

BFI

JUNE 2015 VOLUME 25 ISSUE 6

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound



RACE, YOUTH AND THE FACES OF THE
NEW FRENCH CINEMA

PLUS

- CELINE SCIAMMA ON 'GIRLHOOD' ● OLIVIER ASSAYAS ● FRANCOIS OZON ● 'THE TRIBE'
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Labyrinth of passion

François Ozon's *The New Girlfriend* merges a Chabrol-style thriller with romance, melodrama, farce and even musical. By **Jonathan Romney**



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Abderrahmane Sissako

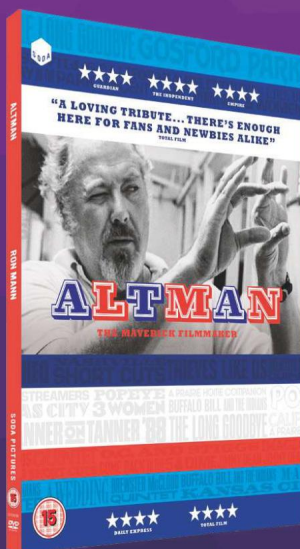
As his powerful new film *Timbuktu* is released, the Mauritanian director tells **Geoff Andrew** why, on screen, a whisper can convey more than a scream



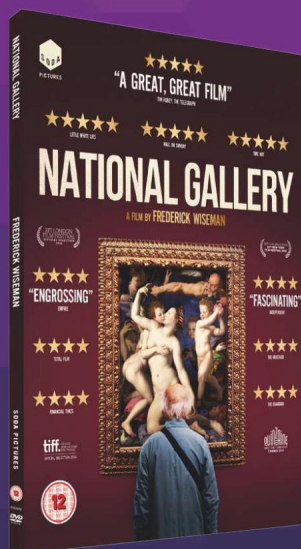
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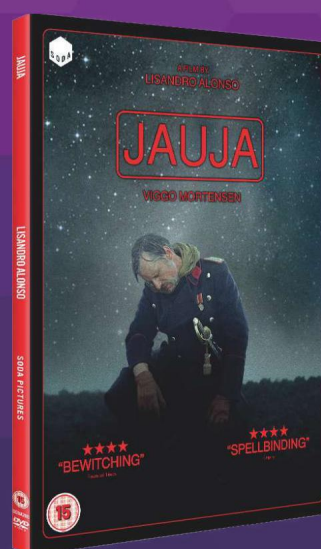
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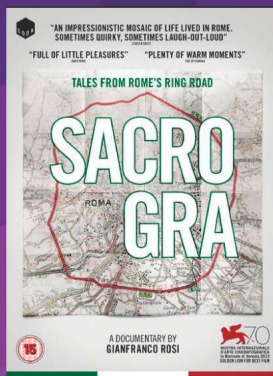
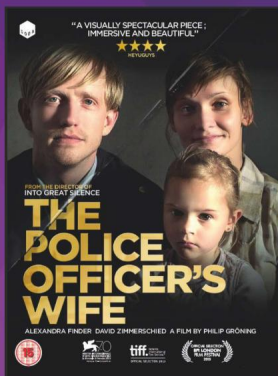
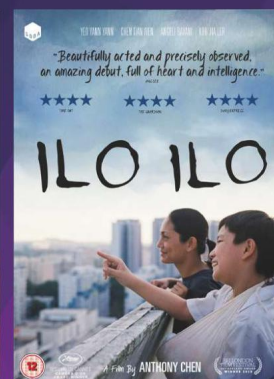
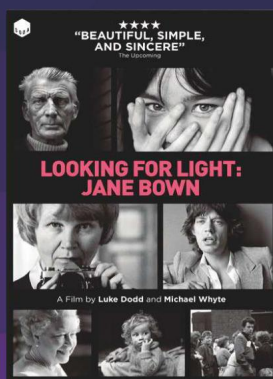
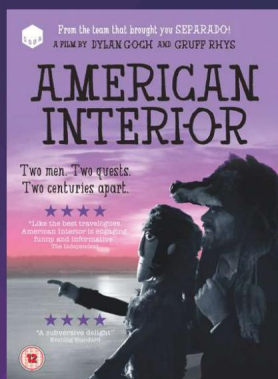


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Design by Mark Swan at kid-ethic.com

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Editorial Nick James



TRUE CRIT

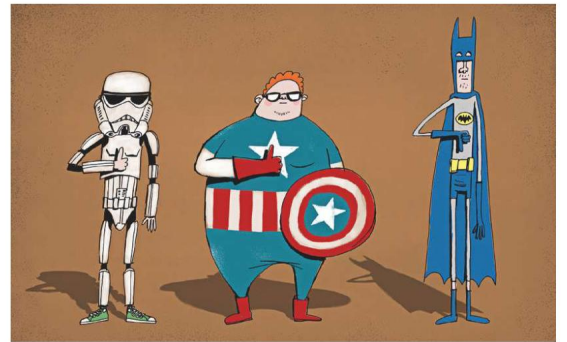
The speed with which film academia moves can be alarming. What was meant to be a topical article about the state of film criticism when I wrote it in 2008 ('Who needs critics?', *S&S*, October 2008) – has just been republished in a new collection, *Film Criticism in the Digital Age*. I mention this not by way of self-promotion (the article is short and I have no financial interest in it) but because there's something uncomfortable about the opinions of a near relative – the person I was seven years ago – representing what I think today.

The article reads to me now like a partial misfire. The first two-thirds seems usefully polemical and informative about that mid-noughties moment when critics were losing their jobs left, right and centre; the last third somewhat scattergun and nostalgic in its keening over the critics' supposed loss of power. If there's an irony in this rereading it is that one of the new book's themes is how 'professional' critics justify their position as gatekeepers – perhaps I mislaid my keys. Never mind. What the book's co-editor Mattias Frey does usefully in his introduction is outline what he considers to be the five key debates that have affected criticism since digital publishing became dominant. So let's use them to briefly readdress matters.

First up is the importance of film evaluation. It's obvious that the critic's role as a tipster of what to see on a Friday night is less central than it was because we now have access to a cacophony of opinions, 'professional' and otherwise. I've often used that situation to promote in-depth critical writing, best read after the film has been seen. But when talking to kids recently about film reviewing at an after-school film club, I rated opinion (aka evaluation) third in importance after correct facts and good description, because the reviewer's primary job is still to assist readers to use their own judgement as to which films to see – that has to be achieved before the critic weighs in with their own opinion. The post-digital tendency has been to devalue criticism's status by assuming all opinions are equal (even if some are more equal than others). This dominance of internet relativism is perhaps insufficiently addressed; it can only be countered, as I argued in 2008, by criticism that's passionate and judicious, and not part of the general even-handed blandness of congratulation.

Next up is the relationship between critic and reader. What's interesting here is that the new orthodoxy of interaction with the reader has not yet attracted the revival in advertising online publishers once hoped it would. Yet a review's digital visibility – the

Talking and writing about films is a communal sport in which critics may be self-elected referees, but it's the discourse that matters, not the personnel



clicks it generates – is considered more important than the accuracy of its opinion. At the same time, the very idea that a work of art can be judged better or worse than another has come under pressure.

These concerns feed directly into the third and fourth debates, respectively about new media's actual impact, and how that has changed criticism as a profession. Critics have responded to the availability of huge amounts of prior information about films – information that was once for critics' privileged access only – by becoming more publicly available themselves as individuals through social media and other outlets.

Meanwhile, the corporate consolidation of so many media companies has rendered their outlets too budget-conscious to afford such luxuries as professional opinion-formers. What, since 2008, has lapsed though – however temporarily – is the feeling of crisis. Since the fifth debate's question is, 'Who can be a critic?', we know the standard anti-elitist answer is 'everyone'. It may be a combination of all these factors that has led to the predominance among working critics, broadly speaking, of enthusiastic fans over chin-stroking assessors.

But though the profession of critic may have become tougher and less clear-cut than it used to be, and though it's still a combination of perceived status and popularity that marks out the so-called professional from the unpaid devotee, the digital revolution has had positive effects. It's brought several exciting new critics into the field and it's made the use of a much wider diversity of writers the necessity it always should have been.

We at *Sight & Sound* tend to trust in your curiosity and keenness. Rather than believe that criticism is all over, we tend to think T.S. Eliot's dictum that "criticism is as inevitable as breathing" holds. Talking and writing about films is a communal sport in which critics may be merely self-elected referees, but it's the discourse that matters, not the personnel.

In the meantime, I haven't read *Film Criticism in the Digital Age* all the way through yet and this is not a review of it. Evaluation will come later, from someone else.

IN THE FRAME

THE FRENCH SELECTION

Grand opening: Emmanuelle Bercot's *Standing Tall*

The august regulars are still in evidence, but this year's Cannes line-up is rather less predictable – and younger – than in recent years

By Isabel Stevens

Are the winds of change blowing on the Croisette? It's still the festival that matters most, that has the clout to send maverick cinema to screens all across the world. But over the last few years the grumbles have been growing louder: too many Cannes perennials offered a Competition pass; too many empty star-laden trifles (Ryan Gosling's *Lost River*; the much-derided *Grace of Monaco*); too few female directors competing for the Palme d'Or; not to mention the paucity of documentary at a time when it is one of the most exciting areas of contemporary filmmaking. Risk-taking when it comes to controversy is part of the festival's DNA (this year's chief provocateur is Gaspar Noé and his 3D, three-hour "joyful porn" film *Love*), but not

when it comes to promoting adventurous young filmmakers to auteur paradise. However, looking back at those films left behind in the Un Certain Regard sidebar over the last few years (*Stranger by the Lake*, *Jauja*, *Amour Fou*) and considering gems such as *National Gallery* and *The Tribe* presented in last year's Directors' Fortnight and Critics' Week sidebars, respectively, the Competition certainly now has some competition.

So what's different about this year's line-up? "The mission is to put new names on the world cinema map," Thierry Frémaux has stated, and to some extent his choices for the most high-profile screenings back this up. For the first time since Markus Schleizer's *Michael* in 2011, there is a debut feature from an unknown director plucked out of the 1,800 submissions to bypass UCR: *Son of Saul*, a drama following two days in the life of a fictitious prisoner at one of Auschwitz's crematoriums, by 38-year-old Hungarian László Nemes (albeit a filmmaker who earned his stripes working for Béla Tarr). Two more films by under-the-radar directors – Michel Franco (*Chronicle*)

and Guillaume Nicloux (*Valley of Love*) – add further spice to the Competition blend this year.

Elsewhere, the Cannes career ladder is firmly in place. Rising up from UCR is Greek surrealist Yorgos Lanthimos with his first English-language film *The Lobster* (a delightfully deranged-sounding dystopian tale about force-breeding and human-animal transformation, which is also being touted as a romcom) and Norwegian filmmaker Joachim Trier with his English-language debut *Louder Than Bombs*. (Should we read anything into the fact that Romanian Cannes regular Corneliu Porumboiu, whose *The Treasure* doesn't have the pulling power of Colin Farrell, Rachel Weisz and Jesse Eisenberg, has not graduated to the Competition?). Meanwhile, Australian director Justin Kurzel, last seen in Critics' Week in 2011 with his gritty debut *Snowtown*, will hopefully add a blood-thirsty tinge to the Competition with his adaptation of *Macbeth*, featuring Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard as the power duo. Likewise, four years ago Critics' Week was the launchpad for Valérie Donzelli's *Declaration of War* and now, her illicit love story and period drama, *Marguerite and Julien*, based on a 1971 screenplay originally intended for François Truffaut, will be considered by the Coen brothers and their jury.

As ever, an enticing selection of august arthousers headlines the Competition – and thankfully they aren't quite as predictable as (and are noticeably younger than) the usual stalwarts. Hou Hsiao-Hsien is the veteran among them. What the great chronicler of Taiwanese history will do with the martial-arts genre in the long-gestating *The Assassin* is one of the Croisette's most tantalising offerings. Highly anticipated too are the films of other Asian Cannes habituals: Jia Zhangke's *Mountains May Depart*, a love story that travels from contemporary China to a futuristic Australia; Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Cemetery of Splendor* (surprisingly not in Palme d'Or contention); and Koreeda Hirokazu's *Our Little Sister*, one of his trademark quiet melodramas. Another melodrama-revivalist, Todd Haynes, returns to the festival for the first time since 1998, continuing to explore his favoured decade – the 1950s – with an adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's novel *Carol*, starring Rooney Mara as a lonely store clerk who falls for Cate Blanchett's titular older woman. Fellow American Gus Van Sant will be

Raymond Cauchetier

Cauchetier may not be well known, but his iconic on-set photos of the French New Wave films (right) are. An exhibition at James Hyman Gallery, London, (17 June–14 August) and a new monograph raid his archive.



Sheffield Doc/Fest

The UK's largest celebration of nonfiction filmmaking returns from 5-10 June, with a new programming team in tow. The full line-up is announced on 7 May but hot tips include the first UK screening of Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Look of Silence* (right) and Sundance hits such as Chad Gracia's Chernobyl investigation, *The Russian Woodpecker*.



ON OUR RADAR



Todd Haynes's *Carol*

hoping *The Sea of Trees* scoops him a second Palme d'Or, following his triumph with *Elephant* in 2003.

French cinema is out in force, with Jacques Audiard's *Dheepan* one of the highlights. Italian cinema is also strongly represented with Nanni Moretti (*Mia madre*), Matteo Garrone (*Tale of Tales*) and Paolo Sorrentino (*Youth*), the last two bringing the English-language films of non-English-language-speaking directors in Competition to four. To assuage the overall mood of optimism, however, here are five words of caution: *This Must Be the Place*. Only time (and hopefully Venice or Toronto screenings) will reveal if the heavily tipped British absentees, Ben Wheatley's *High-Rise* and Terence Davies's *Sunset Song*, deserved to be in the mix. Asif Kapadia's portrait of singer Amy Winehouse, *Amy*, did, however, score a Midnight Screening slot. Meanwhile the frisson between Cannes proper and its younger upstart, the more intrepid Director's Fortnight sidebar, continues, with both Miguel Gomes and Arnaud Desplechin reportedly turning down UCR slots and defecting there after being rejected from the Competition. Gomes's follow-up to the universally praised *Tabu*, is a six-hour *Arabian Nights*-inspired triptych and it will be fascinating to see if the Competition selectors really should have run scared from it.



Koreeda Hirokazu's *Our Little Sister*



Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth*

Perhaps the biggest statement of change is this year's opening film: Emmanuelle Bercot's *Standing Tall*, a tale charting a juvenile delinquent from the ages of six to 18, is the first film by a female director to launch the festival for 28 years and stands in contrast to the razzle-dazzle of last year's *Grace* and 2013's *The Great Gatsby*. This shift seems motivated as much by a desire to highlight more serious, politically engaged films in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks and to boost French cinema in a slot that normally has Hollywood's name on it, as it does to address the festival's woeful under-representation of female directors. One hopes the film lives up to its title.

Indeed the number of female filmmakers in the Competition remains the same as last year, a lowly two, with Maiwenn's *Mon roi* also in contention. But Frémaux and his team are drawing attention to French female directors in particular, with Alice Winocour's *Maryland* also in UCR. Hopefully, Women in Motion, a sidebar of talks highlighting women's contribution to the film industry, will yield a lot more than mere lip service – and with two awards of its own, including one to an up-and-coming female filmmaker, it looks set to do so. 📺



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Yorgos Lanthimos's *The Lobster*

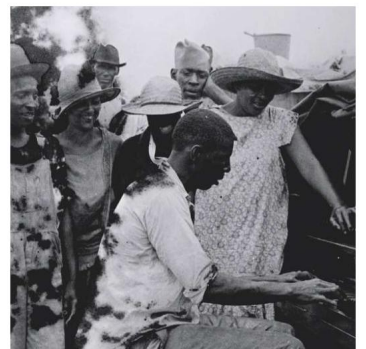
London on Film

A three-month city portrait, using cinema to explore London's history, starts in July at BFI Southbank, London. It boasts more than 200 documentaries and dramas by native Londoners (Hitchcock, John Krish) and outsiders (Jules Dassin, Michelangelo Antonioni) alike. The city will be revealed through the ages: from Victorian and Edwardian times to World War II and the nascent years of redevelopment in the 70s and 80s, as documented in prescient films such as 'The Long Good Friday' (right), also rereleased in UK cinemas on 19 June.



Bill Morrison: Selected Works

This Blu-ray and DVD collection makes available to UK audiences for the first time a rare compendium of the American filmmaker's archive samplings from 1996-2014. Among them are 'The Great Flood', his epic portrayal of the Mississippi River flood of 1927 (right), featuring a score by jazz musician Bill Frisell, and his 2010 reimagining of Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein', 'Spark of Being', accompanied by trumpeter Dave Douglas's soundtrack.



LISTOMANIA COMEDIANS

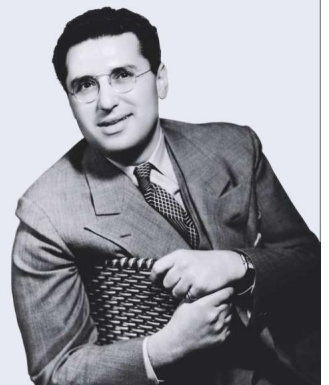
With the release of stand-up-turned-director Chris Rock's *Top Five*, we look back at films that choose comedians as their protagonists.

- 1 **The Entertainer** (1960)
Tony Richardson
- 2 **Mickey One** (1965)
Arthur Penn
- 3 **Lenny** (1974)
Bob Fosse
- 4 **The King of Comedy** (1982, below)
Martin Scorsese
- 5 **Mr. Saturday Night** (1992)
Billy Crystal
- 6 **This Is My Life** (1992)
Nora Ephron
- 7 **Funny Bones** (1994)
Peter Chelsom
- 8 **Man on the Moon** (1999)
Milos Forman
- 9 **The Life and Death of Peter Sellers** (2004)
Stephen Hopkins
- 10 **Obvious Child** (2009)
Gillian Robespierre



QUOTE OF THE MONTH GEORGE CUKOR

'I don't weep or anything, but there's always some part of me left bloody on the scene I've just directed'



FAULT LINES

Class, gender, romance, violence, the nature of reality – for Hollywood, at least, tennis often has very little to do with sport



By Hannah McGill

If tennis has evolved rather from genteel pastime of the British upper crust to mainstream macho supersport, its former

reputation may always define its depiction on screen, such useful shorthand does it provide for a certain way of life. *Wimbledon* (2004) was pitched squarely at the Anglophile market so successfully cornered by Richard Curtis by setting its transatlantic romance against the backdrop of the titular tournament. Woody Allen, having already sexualised tennis with an accidental racket-to-the-crotch in *Annie Hall* (1977), used access to the tennis-playing classes as the motivation for murder in *Match Point* (2005). “What’s a beautiful young American ping-pong player doing mingling among the British upper classes?” asked the film’s anti-hero Chris (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), upon encountering love interest Nola (Scarlett Johansson). Not quite measuring up, except as a sexual prize for the men she meets, would be one answer; indeed, the fact that Nola is introduced playing a reduced, casual version of tennis confirms her as an outsider to the social sphere in which she is mingling.

But Hollywood was trying to better itself by association with the tennis set long before Chris and Nola’s match. Growing interest in tennis as a spectator sport and public pastime coincided with the rise of Hollywood’s alternative aristocracy of megastars – and the game was particularly well-suited to the Californian climate. Charlie Chaplin entertained the original A list at his tennis parties; and a private tennis court remains a movie-star status symbol. Tennis is a symbol of the divide between the socio-economically mismatched couple in *Waterloo Bridge* (1931), while the disruptive vulgarity of the title character in *Stella Dallas* (1937) is affirmed when she embarrasses her daughter in front of the tennis-playing country club set. But the posh English associations of tennis, as well as the potential for violence and duplicity in its gameplay, also convey chilliness and even brutality. The tennis game as outlet for other unspoken tensions, social, sexual and familial, is a frequent trope, deployed in *Accident* (1967), *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987), *The Squid and the Whale* (2005) and *Bridesmaids* (2011). The introduction of real danger into an ostensibly respectable game is perhaps most forcefully and memorably achieved in *Strangers on a Train* (1951), in which Farley Granger’s tennis pro becomes conscious of the crisis he is facing during a match, which then becomes an agonising race against time.

Tennis having been acceptably unisex since its early days, the wielding of a racket can also symbolise the challenge posed by female autonomy. In *Pat and Mike* (1952), Katharine Hepburn’s promising player can’t concentrate



Dinner is served: Jack Lemmon as C.C. Baxter, repurposing his racket in *The Apartment* (1960)



Pat and Mike (1952)

The posh English associations of tennis, and its potential for violence and duplicity, can convey chilliness and even brutality

with her overbearing fiancé watching; she envisages her racket diminishing to pathetic proportions. *Hard, Fast and Beautiful* (1951) sees a professional female player (Claire Trevor) forced to choose between love and sporting success; while the rising champ played by Kirsten Dunst in *Wimbledon* is robbed of her competitive edge when she falls in love.

Leave it to *The Apartment* (1960) – that sweet-and-sourest of romantic comedies, in which marriage vows are broken, suicide attempted and snotty head colds suffered – to most decisively deglamorise Hollywood’s beautiful game. It’s not hard to imagine earnest, aspirational Baxter



Strangers on a Train (1951)

(Jack Lemmon) purchasing his tennis racket in fond anticipation of being invited to spar with his colleagues and superiors. This dynamic bachelor lifestyle having failed to materialise as envisaged, the tennis racket has been repurposed: he uses it to strain spaghetti. Like Baxter himself, apartment-pimp and exploited lackey, and his dreamgirl Fran (Shirley MacLaine), self-deluding and unappreciated mistress, it finds itself commandeered for a function other than that it would best serve. This being used for the wrong purpose is something to which both Baxter and Fran could easily resign themselves, one feels. *The Apartment* catches them, and they catch one another, just at the point when jadedness might set in, and the miseries of a misappropriated life come to be tolerated for the sake of its consolations: eventual professional advancement in Baxter’s case; sporadic sexual gratification in Fran’s. Not that one feels completely confident that they offer one another a sound alternative



Sergei Eisenstein and Charlie Chaplin



The Squid and the Whale (2005)

either – *The Apartment* is the sort of romcom that leaves a distinct whiff of uncertainty in the air as to whether its central couple is actually compatible. Has Fran really got her married boss out of her system? Enough to give up straining his spaghetti, and become someone else's tennis racket? And is Baxter really grown-up enough to start using things for their proper purpose?

Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966) extends this sense of purposelessness, of times out of joint. Its concluding tennis game uses no equipment at all, but the protagonist (David Hemmings) still stands and watches – he even returns the non-existent ball when it goes astray. This act may signal his rejection of conventional reality, or his resigned reintegration into a society that coddles itself with pretence and illusion. Certainly this racketless match serves to remind the audience of its own susceptibility to illusion; or as Baxter might put it, the willingness of our suspension, belief-wise. **S**

THE FIVE KEY...

FILMS ABOUT FLIGHT

Cinema has been flying high on the daring, romantic and murderous exploits of aviators since its early days

By Kate Stables

Film and powered flight were born close together (Orville Wright and *The Great Train Robbery* both took off in 1903), and Hollywood has fed the public's aerial obsession since *Lilac Time* and *Hell's Angels* portrayed the speed and drama of wartime flying. Post-World War II dramas such as *Twelve O'Clock High*, *The Dam Busters* and *Battle of Britain* tempered thrills with grateful patriotism, or later with barnstorming gallantry in *The Great Waldo Pepper*. But to mark the rerelease of Howard Hawks's ruggedly romantic 1939 flyboy classic *Only Angels Have Wings*, we'll be 'Calling Barranca...'

i *Only Angels Have Wings* is rereleased in UK cinemas on 15 May



2 *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939) Hawks had done much to define the pilot-hero in *The Dawn Patrol* (1930) and *Ceiling Zero* (1936), but this crackling airmail action melodrama, replete with story secrets, macho redemption and stoicism, is his finest aerial outing. Jean Arthur and a hard-bitten Cary Grant bumpily pursuing their happy landing are as exhilarating as the 360-degree tracking shot of a nerve-racking plateau landing.



4 *Top Gun* (1986) Applications for the US Navy aviation programme purportedly rose 500 per cent after Tony Scott's Reagan-era tale of high-altitude hotshots unleashed its kinetic action sequences, hard bodies and sleek planes on US audiences. Regardless of its gung-ho patriotism, video-game aesthetic and thinly veiled homoeroticism, Scott's James-Dean-meets-joystick thrills ushered in a new era of blockbuster action cinema.



1 *Wings* (1927) With its death-defying dogfights, love-rival plot and heroic camaraderie, this spectacular WWI adventure forged the flying-film template, winning the first Academy Award for Best Picture. As a decorated veteran of the French air corps, William Wellman deplored studio fakery, so stars Richard Arlen (also a military aviator) and game learner Charles 'Buddy' Rogers flew their own planes for pilot close-ups.



3 *Angels One Five* (1952) Battles are mostly heard radioed tensely through the ops room, rather than seen, in George More O'Ferrall's realistically downbeat and stiff-upper-lipped WWII RAF fighter-station drama. But when primitively animated German bombers have "really caught us with both pairs of trousers at the cleaners this time", John Gregson's earnest rookie and the film's low-key storytelling earn their stripes.



5 *The Wind Rises* (2013) Miyazaki Hayao's career-long obsession with flight culminated in this elegant, melancholy, fictionalised biopic about the soaring dreams and earthly armament compromises of Zero fighter designer Horikoshi Jiro. Visually breathtaking and morally ambiguous, it's an unlikely, hand-drawn descendant of the British wartime morale-booster *The First of the Few* (1942), exploring the fighter plane as both beauty and beast.



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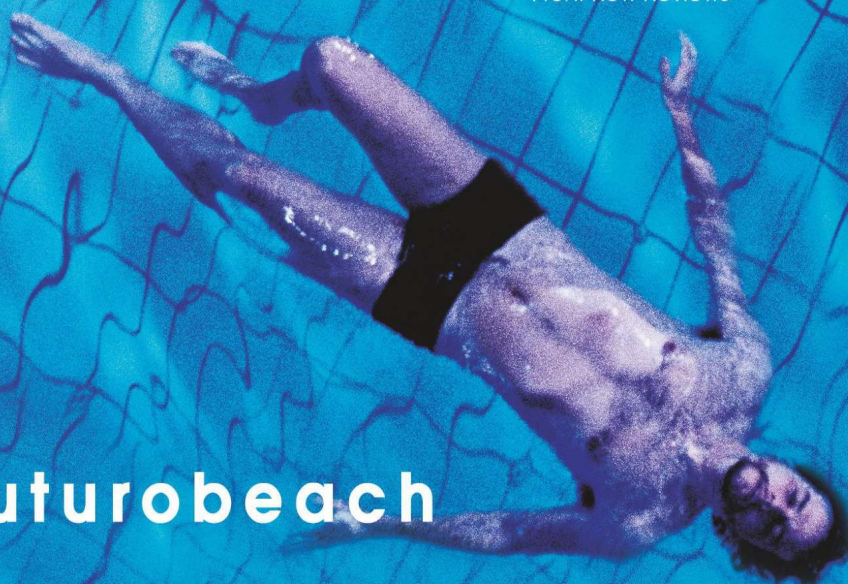


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A FILM BY
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Front Row Reviews



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HARD LABOUR

Debbie Tucker Green discusses ambiguity, music and language, and working with 'more zeroes' on her feature debut *Second Coming*

By Ashley Clark

After 15 years of international success on the stage with powerful dramatic plays including *random* and *generations*, London-based Debbie Tucker Green makes her screenwriting and directing feature debut with *Second Coming*. It's a hushed and disturbing parable starring Nadine Marshall as Jax, a married woman who mysteriously falls pregnant. It doesn't seem that her partner Mark (Idris Elba) is the father, so who is? Perhaps the clue is in the title.

Green is famously publicity-shy, so I was pleased to be granted a rare interview at her agent's offices in leafy West London. She's far from retiring in person, though, speaking in a rapid-fire London patter, with her hands making a flurry of arcs and gestures in tandem with her words.

AC: After working in theatre for so many years, how did you come around to the idea of making a film?

DTG: It's a mountain to climb from thinking you've got a film – or even a script – to getting it made. *Random* started off as a stage play, and ran for years. I had no intention of it going on to screen because I don't think things always translate very well [Tucker Green adapted it for Channel 4 in 2011]. It was just apparent when I was writing that *Second Coming* was a feature. I think in pictures, so I saw lots of air around this story. Visually, it had a different tone.

AC: With regard to industry practice, how did you find the process differed between stage and cinema?

DTG: For me, it's story and script first, and the other industry drama comes after. There's more people involved in film, even when it's low-budget – more fingers in the pie. So that was a little newer. That was probably the biggest difference, people putting in their two-pence worth. If you 'get it', then it's fine, we can work on the script; but if I don't think you're 'getting it', then we're in a bit of trouble... With *Random*, at Channel 4, we had some rough and tumble. But we turned it around quite quickly. It was a case of "I haven't got time for politeness, let's just get on it." I'm not saying it's a horrible thing. There are a few more zeroes involved in film, and people are a bit more jumpy, so I understand it. You have to push back though, because, trust me, I recognise my film! [laughs]

AC: *Second Coming* is purposely ambiguous. Was there any pressure on you to explain more to the audience?

DTG: I thought the film was quite definitive! But it's been interesting watching it with audiences, because it's more open-ended than I'd thought, which is fine. It's sparked debate, with people having little rows about what they thought happened. But there wasn't much pressure on me about the ending. For me it was interesting to watch this woman over her pregnancy and not be sure. It's all played out in a day-to-day way; a lot of it for Jax is behind the eyes; her trying to keep up.



Debbie Tucker Green: 'I'm not looking to represent the whole, because everybody lives differently'

AC: And Nadine Marshall is especially good in a tricky role...

DTG: She's all right [laughs]. No, I'm joking. The part wasn't written for her. I don't write for actors. The script was there, I'd worked with her before. There was a thought process: she was right, age-wise, for one. And whoever played Jax, Mark and the kid... you had to *feel* it before you could see it. Sometimes I don't always believe family units on screen. I was still thinking about combinations. I can't remember at what stage we cast Kai [Francis Lewis, as son JJ], but things started falling into place. I hadn't worked with Idris before, and Kai had only done one job. The brief to the casting director was that I just wanted a regular kid who goes to drama club once a week or whatever – nothing against signed-up stage-school kids.

I thought the film was quite definitive! But watching it with audiences, it's more open-ended than I'd thought



Nadine Marshall and Idris Elba in *Second Coming*

AC: Your dialogue is rhythmical and intricate. Is your writing more influenced by music than other playwrights?

DTG: I definitely love music, and what it can do. There's something for me about the playfulness of dialogue; music reflects on language definitely, whether it's kids or grown-ups. It's something that we have that's very flexible. Yet the film gets quieter and quieter as we go through. You've got a character who becomes more internal. There's something quite powerful about having the time, and space, to watch her do that.

AC: I wrote for this magazine in 2013 about Horace Ové's *Pressure* [Endings, S&S, December 2013], and how it's depressingly rare to see everyday black British life – in this case a family of West Indian heritage – represented on film. Too often, I feel, we still see black British representation pegged around certain limited issues like criminality. Your film was so moving for me because it was just like going around to my Jamaican grandmother's house. Was this a consideration for you?

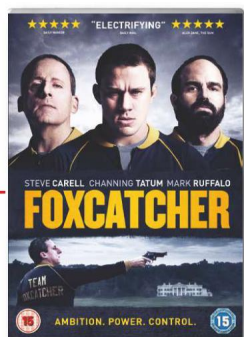
DTG: For me it's about this particular family, they're just regular folks. I'm not looking to represent the whole, because everybody lives differently. It wasn't a huge "I must do this, that and the other," but rather I just wanted to stay true to these characters; it so happens they are of specific heritage. To me it's important these characters have their foundation. People have told me things like you've just done, which is great. But you need to go and talk to the commissioners, innit! People who've got the money to fund stuff. There are stories out there to be told, and the talent is out there. ☺

i *Second Coming* is released in UK cinemas on 15 May and is reviewed on page 64

fresh produce



foxcatcher
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released 18/05/15



a most violent year
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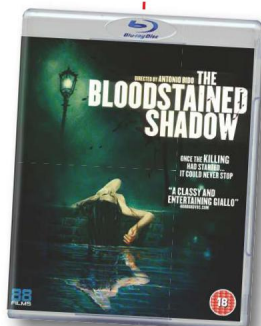
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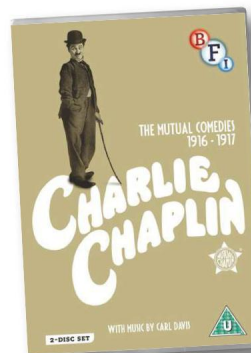
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season one
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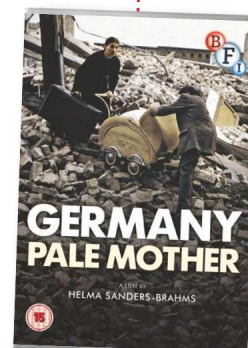
the bloodstained shadow
released 18/05/15



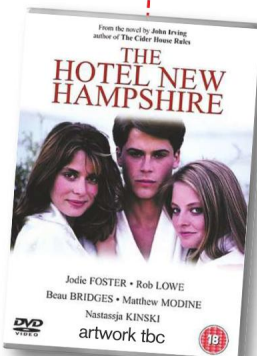
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germany, pale mother
also available on blu-ray
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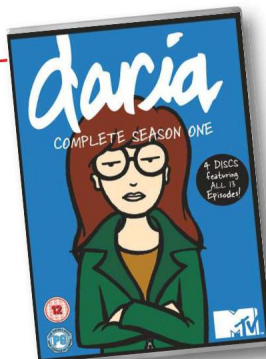


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collector's edition
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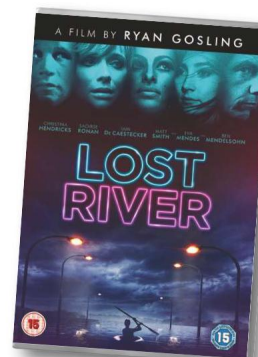


marwencol
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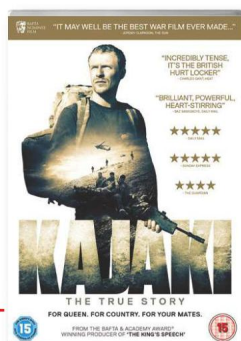
daria
season one
released 01/06/15



charlie chaplin: the mutual comedies 1916-1917
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THE LIGHT BRIGADE



However fluent you learn to be in the language of the camera, sometimes it's worth having a native speaker to interpret



By Mark Cousins

In my twenties and early thirties, I directed TV documentaries. It was the 1990s, so the cameras were still big, crews were large and, as I hadn't

trained in cinematography, I always used a DP.

Doing so was like having a translator. I spoke and then they interpreted it into another language—imagery. They were talented people but, as I too spoke the language of imagery to some degree, I'd sometimes contest their translation, their shot, their framing. More and more I'd micro-direct. I'd say "Left a bit, right a bit, up a bit, down a bit," but almost never handled the camera or looked through the viewfinder myself. There was a force field around the camera. It was a no-go area, a male, technological domain from which novices or women (the DPs were mostly male) were discouraged.

But then the technology simplified, and the force field died. I shot a film in Iraq, *The First Movie* (2009), and it came out fine. It was the first of six feature-length films on which I was my own cinematographer. I fell in love with shooting. I'd get up before dawn and run around Kolkata capturing the dust in the sunlight. With a DP I'd need to knock on their hotel room and wake them up to do that. I'd stand in a river up to my chest, and film. I shot from planes and in torrential rain in Moscow. I filmed people crying and myself naked. Adventures and intimacies. I hate pans and tilts, so did none, and didn't have to explain why I didn't want them. The camera, the image and I were a threesome. I was running with the ball.

Then, last year, I made a film with a cinematographer again. No ordinary cinematographer. Chris Doyle, the brilliant image maker for Wong Kar Wai, Gus Van Sant and many others, shot the key scenes in my new film *I Am Belfast*. I'd admired him from afar and now he was my eyes. I was thrilled, of course, that the man who contributed to some of the most seductive movie images of the last generation—*In the Mood for Love*—was doing our film, but what about the adventure and intimacy that I'd come to love? Would I have to forfeit it for the beauty Doyle brought?

No. On the contrary. Working with him has made my relationship with the imagery in my film more proximate. I can smell its breath like never before. A few days before we starting shooting, I was in a Croatian church, looking at icon paintings. The flat gold background on the icon paintings gave me an idea. Maybe we should film our central character against a gold wall, as if she herself was in an icon painting? I texted my producer, who had our production designer paint a wall in Belfast gold. If I had been shooting the film myself, with my usual tiny budgets, I would probably have filmed our actor, Helena Beren, walking towards the gold wall with a locked-off shot. When Chris got to the location, he put a light on the back of Helena's head, and had her walk to the gold wall. As she did, he opened up the iris. And he tracked a little. The sun came out, so she had two shadows, one from it and one from our light. And then he had the electrician pan the light during the shot. My shot would have had one movement—Helena's walk. His has four—walking, tracking, iris-ing and light panning. As

We live in a word-world. I feel more comfortable with imagery, so speaking and writing have always felt like translation to me

the sequence is about the feeling you get in cities of being surrounded by movement and sound, the four simultaneous movements work well.

I was no longer running with the ball. I was throwing it across the field to someone who then ran like the wind with it. The imagery became a relay, a call and response. Some people might have said "But why use a reference from an icon painting?" I would have found it hard to answer this logically, but Chris Doyle was already running (he's like a mountain goat) so we didn't have to stop to analyse or justify. We got caught up in the excitement of image-making. There's adrenaline in that, as Paul Cézanne knew, as Van Gogh knew. Outdoors, in changing light, when it might rain, the speed of thought, of passing the ball, matters.

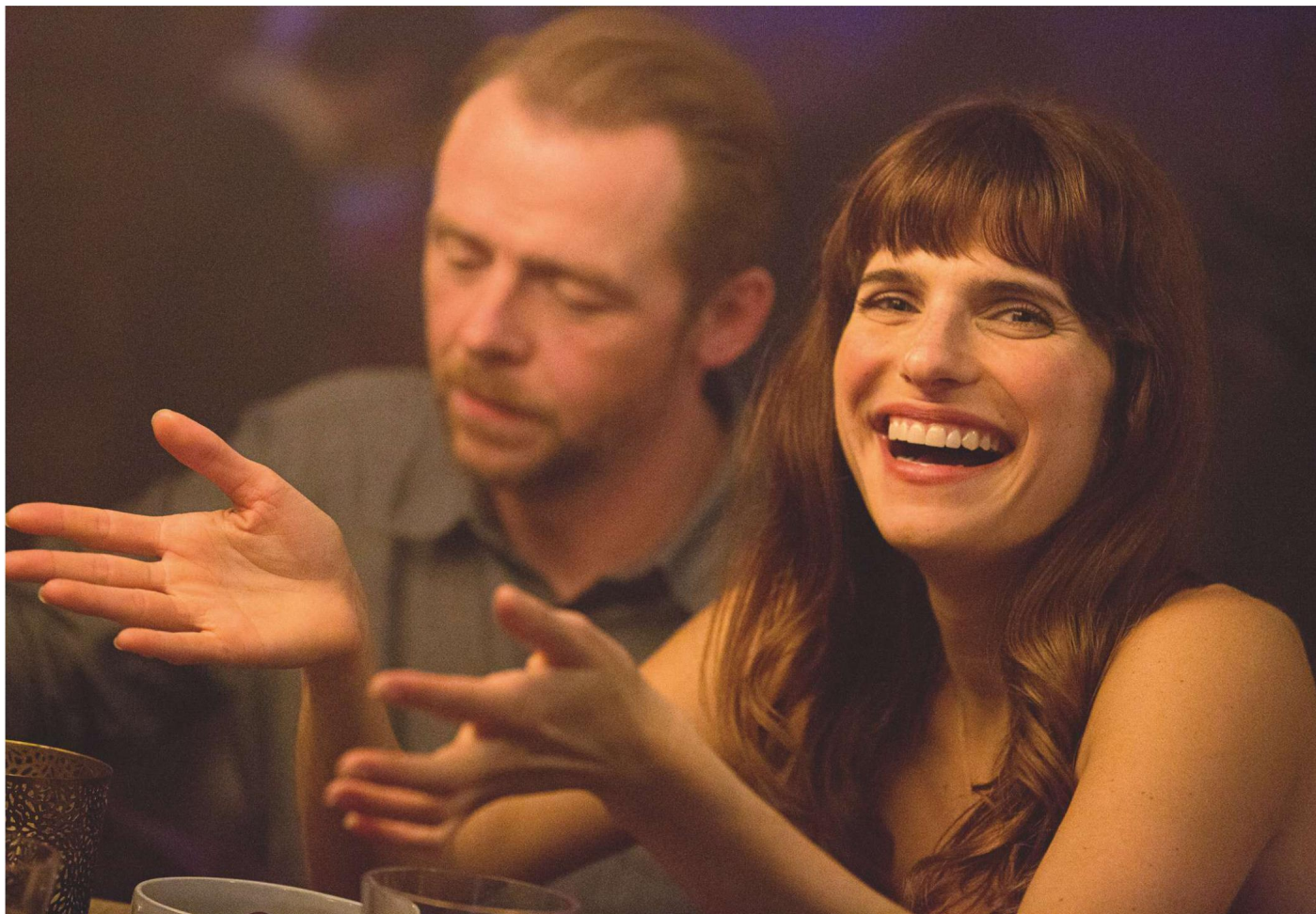
We live so much in a word-world. I've always felt more comfortable with imagery, so speaking and writing have always felt like translation to me. To meet someone who sees that a gold background is like an adjective, and who catches the ring of that adjective and builds sentences around it the way a good improv comedian builds a joke, faster than thinking, has been great for me. Early in the shoot, we were filming, long lens, at a salt hill. Helena walked past it, and Chris...panned the camera. And then tilted! Given my dislike of these moves, I nearly called cut, but was a bit in awe of him still, and thought "We won't use those moves in the edit". But then I looked at them. And liked them. They weren't just following the action. They were more dreamy than that.

Passing the ball, and translating: it's hard not to mix metaphors when you're talking about cinematography. It's the technical heart of film, an artform which itself is a mixed metaphor, but it's the emotional heart, too. If quantum mechanics shows that light behaves like both particles and waves, then it's OK to say that cinematography is a ball game and a polyglot conversation.

Especially when the person behind the camera is Christopher Doyle. ☺

DEVELOPMENT TALE

MAN UP



Date with destiny: Simon Pegg and Lake Bell in *Man Up*

It took a lot of heartache to give screenwriter Tess Morris the theme for her first feature, and quite a bit more to get it on screen

By Charles Gant

Tess Morris's first produced work as screenwriter was *Beer Goggles*, directed in 1997 by David Mackenzie. Morris was still at university at the time, and the 11-minute short was made as part of the then-annual Lloyds Bank Channel 4 Film Challenge scheme. The director of *Beer Goggles* soon made the leap into feature films – last year's *Starred Up* was his eighth – but Morris's road as a writer proved far more rocky. Her debut feature *Man Up*, a British romantic comedy starring Lake Bell and Simon Pegg, arrives in cinemas this month.

After university, Morris found a niche in teen journalism, where she regularly interviewed the photogenic young cast of teen soap *Hollyoaks*. The show was constantly on the hunt for new writers, and Morris joined the writing team at the age of 23, writing 18 episodes over the next two years. There she won a reputation for comedy,

and would be handed episodes that called for that facility. "It was a brilliant introduction to writing, working with other people, hitting deadlines," says Morris today. "It's such a brilliant school to go to, and my God, it pays the bills."

Life outside the *Hollyoaks* bubble proved not so easy. "I felt I'd learned enough, and in my head I just imagined I'd walk into loads of writing work, and that would be my life," Morris says. "It turned out to be a little bit different."

She wrote a pilot for a sitcom, *Granny and Annie*, based on her relationship with her Jewish grandmother. It never got made but it did win her attention from UK production company DLT Entertainment, makers of TV sitcom *My Family*, and she spent a season on the writing team. Then came many fallow years, devising spec pilots with a couple of different co-writers. "I basically spent five years writing sitcoms that didn't get made," Morris says. "It wasn't a regular living at all and that was what caused me to have a big life change, round about 2008. I hit a bit of a personal and professional low. And decided that I didn't want to write any more, and that writing was to blame for everything going wrong in my life."

She found work as a script reader, appraising

submissions for the BFI and Film4, and she co-produced a short called *Rise of the Appliances* with producer Richard Holmes (*Waking Ned*). "I started to think maybe I'd be a better producer than a writer," Morris says. "It's such an isolating job being a writer. It was so nice to be on set and be around people. But I started to miss writing, which I thought was a very good sign. I was reading a lot of good scripts but also some bad scripts. It gave me a lot of confidence: if these are getting 'recommends' at the BFI, maybe I could try and write my own."

One day, waiting under the clock at Waterloo station, a man walked up to her and asked if she was his blind date, Claire. She said no, and then thought: what might have happened had she said yes? That was the spark for *Man Up*, the story of a wild and freewheeling night in London between two people who meet just so. Morris read Billy Mernit's *Writing the Romantic Comedy*, "which totally unlocked me writing [one]". She moved back in with her parents, and offered them a deal: "I'm going to write a film, and if it doesn't work, I'll go and get a proper job." She began in January 2011, and three months later had her *Man Up* spec script.

In March that year Paul Feig's *Bridesmaids* screened at the South by Southwest festival as a work in progress. Nira Park, head of UK comedy powerhouse Big Talk, saw it and returned to London lamenting the lack of British equivalents: a feisty, warts-and-all comedy from a woman's perspective. Then *Man Up* landed on her desk. According to Morris, "She always says it did feel like a bit manna from heaven: 'I just asked for that and, what the fuck, now here it is.' The *Bridesmaids* effect was huge for me, and was a massive bump up in terms of financiers going, 'Oh look, people will pay to go and see these films, and it doesn't have to have a huge star in it.'"

Big Talk optioned the script; StudioCanal, with whom the company had a first-look deal, agreed to finance development. Eighteen months of further drafts followed, but landing the right director proved tricky. "We looked at some American ones," Morris says. "Then we looked over here for a British one, and there just didn't seem to be anyone who could just, like, do it, that we felt had the right voice and style."

Casting was also a challenge. Britain has plenty of well-known film actresses around the right age (34), but none particularly known for comedy. It's perhaps no coincidence that virtually every female lead in a major British romcom for the past two decades has been American: Andie MacDowell in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, Julia Roberts in *Notting Hill*, Gwyneth Paltrow in *Sliding Doors*, Renée Zellweger in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Kirsten Dunst in *Wimbledon* and Rachel McAdams in *About Time*.

"We did have conversations about making her American," says Morris, but the character

She moved back in with her parents, offering them a deal: 'I'm going to write a film. If it doesn't work, I'll go and get a proper job'

has scenes with a sister and their parents, which added complications. "We had a solution, but it wasn't a great one. Every time I thought about doing it, my heart sank a bit. It would have unravelled so much of the script for me, just in terms of their references as well." The solution arrived in the form of Lake Bell, who studied acting in the UK and is renowned for her ability with accents. *Man Up* had found its Nancy. By then, Simon Pegg was on board, as was Ben Palmer (*The Inbetweeners Movie*) as director.

"It was like 14 years to have an overnight success," comments Morris, now 38. "I say that as a joke, but it's true. I'm a very realistic person, but I have a very random love life. I get dumped a lot. I suddenly felt I had lots to say about relationships, because I was 34 and I actually did. I think with *Man Up*, I just thought, ah, finally, this is what I want to talk about. And all these years of scribbling stuff down in my notepad, and things people have said to me, I can now properly use, and I know how to use them. I always felt it was there in me, and I got to the point where I had the confidence." 📌

i *Man Up* is released in UK cinemas on 29 May and is reviewed on page 78

THE NUMBERS WILD TALES

By Charles Gant

Hardly one of the most anticipated films in the Cannes 2014 Official Competition line-up, Damián Sziffrón's *Wild Tales* quickly emerged as one of the more fondly regarded and entertaining titles of the festival. In terms of commercial potential, the hurdles included a director barely known outside his native Argentina and a portmanteau structure of six vignettes. It was hard to point to an example of this format working with audiences in the past.

At Curzon Artificial Eye, which bought the film in Cannes, head of theatrical Jon Rushton agrees that portmanteau films "can be challenging", but the distributor was nevertheless encouraged by audience response. "The challenge was going to be how to market the film," he adds. "It's not a straightforward proposition to explain to cinema audiences."

Wild Tales has mainstream appeal, but Curzon had to be mindful that the market for foreign-language films in the UK is essentially for titles with an arthouse positioning – the broadest comedies from France, Germany or Italy, for example, barely play here. "The film has the potential to play to a broader audience than most foreign-language films," explains Rushton, "but that's quite a tricky thing to pull off." One asset was the brand value of producer Pedro Almodóvar – a marketable name who was also helpful in terms of positioning the film as an edgy and twisted comedy.

Having opted for a 27 March release date, Curzon had the advantage of coming after a long stretch without a significant foreign-language release. January and early February is a no-go area for foreign-language films, with indie cinemas clogged with Oscar-bait. In 2015, distributors proved more cautious than ever, giving awards season an especially wide berth. *White God*, landing in late February, failed to make much of a mark; *Mommy*, in mid-March, fared better. But since *Leviathan* (£289,000 UK box office), released in early November, it's been lean pickings.



Bride of vengeance: Erica Rivas in *Wild Tales*

With just three days to go until release, Curzon's carefully planned campaign was thrown for a loop when a Germanwings pilot deliberately crashed a plane, echoing the six-minute opening segment of *Wild Tales*. Exhibitors wanted to know how Curzon's own cinemas were handling the situation, and, more or less inevitably, the *Daily Mail* exploited the controversy. Signs were placed at box offices warning customers; Curzon is not aware of any actual complaints.

"My opinion is that it had no impact on the result," says Rushton, and the numbers bear this out: *Wild Tales* opened with a hefty £183,000 from 50 cinemas – the biggest debut for a non-Bollywood foreign-language film since *The Raid 2* back in April 2014, and the biggest ever for a film available simultaneously on Curzon Home Cinema and other premium VOD platforms.

Prior to the Germanwings tragedy, the problematic opening sequence had in fact been playing at Curzon's own cinemas for a week, in place of the standard trailer reel. At that time, it had received "a great response", says Rushton. "We were obviously concerned but people took the film as it was intended." 📌

SOUTH AMERICAN CINEMA AT UK/IRELAND BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
The Motorcycle Diaries	2004	£2,711,477
City of God	2003	£2,372,951
The Secret in Their Eyes	2010	£776,655
Maria Full of Grace	2005	£696,122
Central Station	1999	£678,663
Wild Tales	2015	£601,132*
Bombón: El perro	2005	£446,913
Nine Queens	2002	£410,973
No	2013	£345,571
Elite Squad	2008	£129,356

*still on release



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BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

Decent British horror films are rarer than vampires in daylight. It's almost enough to give you nightmares



By Ben Roberts

Cannes is breathing down our necks again, but several films from last year's festival (*Wild Tales*, *Force majeure*, *The Tale of the Princess*

Kaguya) have only just made it to cinemas in the clearing house between the Oscars and May.

It took nine months for Icon to release another of last Cannes' big hits – David Robert Mitchell's superb low-budget sex-panic horror *It Follows* – a film I tried and failed to see a couple of times at the festival, and eventually saw here in February. It was worth the wait, as it's probably the film I have most admired and envied in the past 12 months.

It Follows looks and sounds like a Wes Craven film shot by Gregory Crewdson on John Carpenter's sidewalks, without once feeling like a copycat. It's a film full of disturbing thoughts, lingeringly creepy, and with a rotten-America smell, its characters all but abandoned. I'd call it one of the most intelligent and unnerving films I've seen this year.

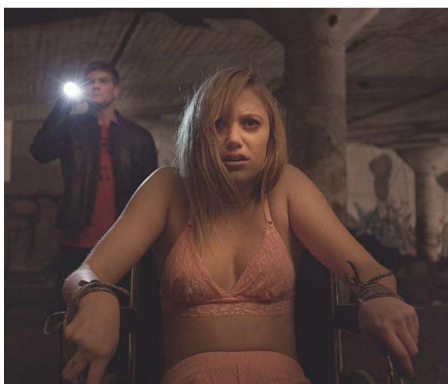
That's why I admire it. I envy it because we're not making films like it here, and we could.

It Follows was released within a few weeks of Australian Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook*, another intelligent, artful – almost *Machinal*-expressionistic – and scary piece of work. (By the way, Icon released both films, as well as Adam Wingard's throwback *The Guest*: they seem to be championing the resurgence of smart and properly scary horror). Box office-wise, Australians don't have the kind of appetite for horror that we do in the UK (although they also made the unbearably-horrible-in-a-good-way *Wolf Creek*) but our opposite numbers at Screen Australia will be rightly proud of it.

We're often asked if we'll consider horror projects – if we value them as much as more obviously awards-friendly material. The truth is that we see very few, would love to see more and are trying to develop where we can. I think Ben Wheatley's *Kill List* was probably the last British film that understood horror as something other than a series of fake-outs and jumpy sound design, but I've struggled to come up with many more. James Watkins's *Eden Lake* maybe? But that was seven years ago. What am I missing?

It's not an issue of the cost-benefit. Both *It Follows* and *The Babadook* were made for around \$2 million – roughly the budget of many of the first and second features we support. Mitchell maxed out on his production values thanks

Most attempts at horror fail to get the basics right, let alone genuinely get under the skin and keep us awake in the night



Follow that: Maika Monroe in *It Follows*

to the real, grand-scale urban decay of his hometown Detroit, while Kent barely leaves the house. When it comes to making do on a low budget, horror is the mother of both invention and reinvention. Sixteen years ago, *The Blair Witch Project* brought about an entirely new, lo-fi approach to the genre; that has long since eaten itself and the pioneers have moved on. Cannes, Sundance, Toronto, Venice – pretty much all the festivals like horror. It sells well internationally, and it picks up better than average audiences on DVD, VOD and pay TV too.

So... horror is rich in subtext, a playground for experimenting, cheap to make, audience-friendly... Why aren't more talented writers/directors having a stab?

It could be squeamishness but I don't think it's snobbishness. More likely, many filmmakers aren't sure they can pull it off. Scaring your audience (like making them laugh) relies on precise imagination and technique. It helps to be literate too, like Mitchell. The simplicity of the conceit, the framing and cutting are everything in *It Follows*: it feels entirely considered in execution, not turned up to 11 in post. Most attempts fail to get the basics right, let alone genuinely get under the skin and keep us awake in the night – which is why the good ones hit big.

We are talking to a couple of exciting filmmakers (both women, in fact) who are interested in where they could go with the genre. And we've started planning a specific development project around horror later this year, to inspire a bit more confidence.

For the industry, horror can serve several purposes. It's a way to get big ideas in front of an audience looking to be entertained; it's catnip for the younger crowds who won't otherwise venture far outside bigger-budget mainstream film; it even seems to relax those with a resistance to foreign-language film; and it can make money.

Horror can offer the kind of hand-holding shared experience that makes cinema-going unique. At the same time it is a genre that has often pioneered in both filmmaking and marketing. It's a good place to really start breaking the windows if we want to grab a new VOD audience who will pay for films if they're not made to wait.

It might sound like a stretch, but in this way horror really could be more than cheap thrills: it could contribute to the salvation of independent film. @bfiiben

IN PRODUCTION

● **Kenneth Lonergan** is currently shooting *Manchester-by-the-Sea*, his belated follow-up to *Margaret*, in Massachusetts. Casey Affleck and Michelle Williams star in the story of a plumber who returns to his hometown after his brother's death.

● **Andrea Arnold** looks set to finally begin shooting *American Honey*, her first US feature, originally announced almost a year ago. The film follows a young woman who runs away from home and embarks on a hedonistic trip across the States while selling magazine subscriptions. The lead has yet to be announced, but Shia LaBeouf has been cast in a supporting role.

● **James Gray**, whose acclaimed 2013 feature *The Immigrant* has yet to see a UK release, is working with the French TV giant Canal+ to develop an 'adult-oriented' animated series entitled *Hard Apple*. Gray will executive produce and supervise the writing of the series, based on Jerome Charyn's Isaac Sidel novels, about a Jewish New York detective turned mayor.

● **Spike Lee** is to make his next feature, *Chiraq*, for Amazon Studios. Plot details are under wraps, but Lee has reportedly been courting Samuel L. Jackson, Jeremy Piven, Common and Kanye West to be in the cast.

● **Ben Rivers** (*A Spell to Ward off the Darkness*) is in post-production on his next film, the intriguingly titled *The Earth Trembled and the Sky Was Afraid...* It is produced by Jacqui Davis, and co-funded by Artangel and the BFI.

● **Michael Mann** is to direct a film of the life of Enzo Ferrari, the car mogul and Formula One pioneer. The film is to be based on Brock Yates's 1991 book *Enzo Ferrari: The Man, the Cars, the Races*.

● **Mike Leigh**'s next film will be about Peterloo – the 1819 massacre by government forces at a peaceful pro-democracy rally at St Peter's Field in Manchester, when some 500 working people were injured, and around 18 killed. The film will shoot in 2017.

● **Bertrand Bonello** (below), responding to current tensions in France in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, is to direct a film about a fictional terrorist bomb plot that strikes at the heart of Paris. *Paris est une fête* will star non-professional actors, and will hopefully shoot in Paris this summer.



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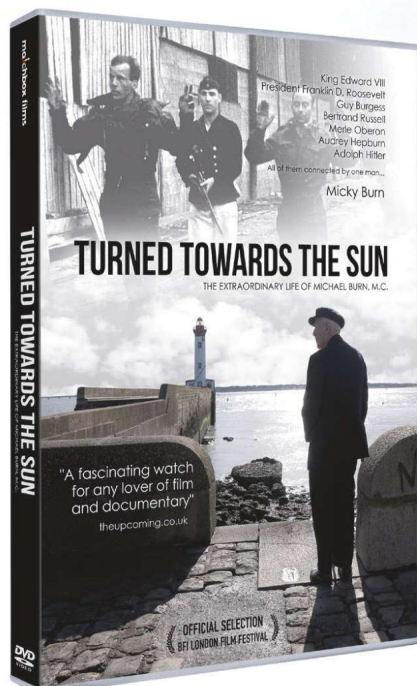
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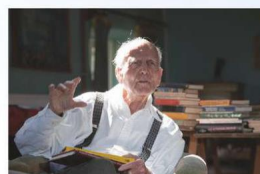
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FUTURE SOUNDS

A new generation of exhibition sound technology is helping to expand cinema's storytelling potential beyond the screen

By Jasper Sharp

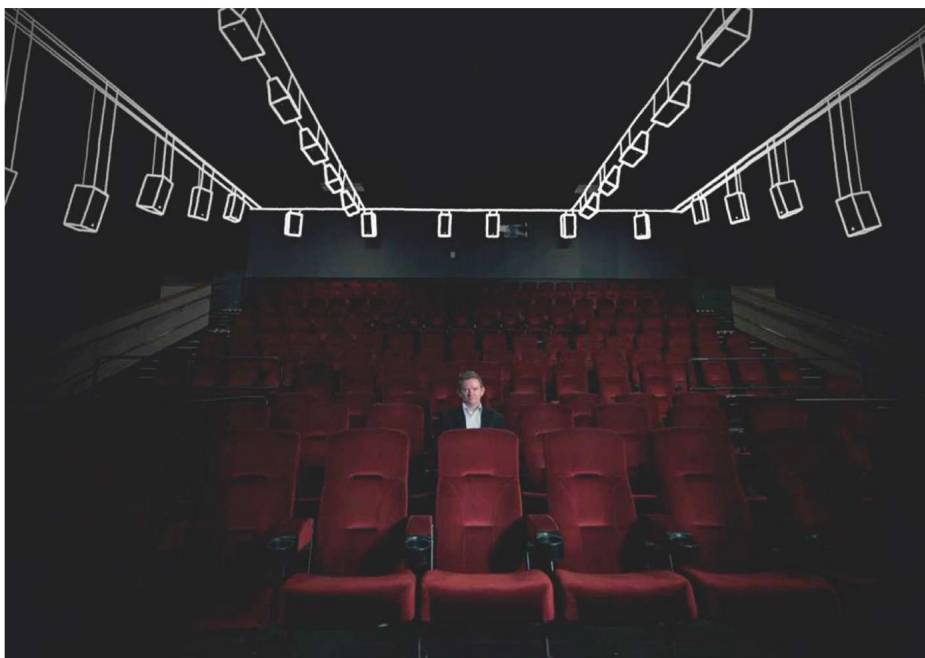
It is becoming increasingly anachronistic to think of cinema purely in terms of the traditional screen image. These days, 3D alternative versions of the latest Hollywood hits are the norm, and new exhibition technologies such as the South Korean-developed 4DX – with its automated chair movements, smells, sprays and other auditorium effects – are sweeping the world (the first installation in the UK opened at Cineworld Milton Keynes in January, having spread rapidly across south-east Asia, Eastern Europe and South America). What actually appears on screen is, for many cinemagoers, less and less the thing that defines the theatrical event.

The expressive potential of sound in putting the viewer in the picture, so to speak, is often underplayed, by audiences, critics and filmmakers themselves. Nevertheless, high-fidelity, multi-speaker sound reproduction was a key component of the widescreen exhibition technologies that appeared in the 1950s, to combat the threat of TV. Systems such as Cinerama accommodated multichannel soundtracks on separate strips of film; with conventional single-strip technologies discrete audio tracks had to compete with the image for space on the projection print.

Digital technology has liberated audio and image from the constraints of a carrier medium. This lies at the heart of the latest developments in sound, spearheaded by Dolby Laboratories with its Atmos system. Atmos was given its first public airing with Pixar's *Brave* at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood in June 2012. Since then, more than 900 Dolby Atmos screens have been installed or committed to across 40 territories; and more than 200 films mixed for Atmos, from 17 countries, have been released or are scheduled for release.

Atmos is the latest step in the company's sonic advance, following the introduction of Dolby Surround 7.1 with *Toy Story 3* in 2010. The system is capable of handling 128 discrete audio tracks fed to up to 64 speakers, to give a scalable system that in theory can be adapted for any auditorium.

One enhancement is the addition of ceiling-mounted height channels for overhead effects such as helicopters, thunder and rain. But Atmos is capable of a far more sophisticated range of applications, thanks to its conceptual shift from channel-based to object-based technology. So while, as in previous surround-sound systems, individual speakers can be pinpointed to replicate surrounding environmental noises (for example, the chatter of fellow diners seated around the viewer/listener in a restaurant scene), the Atmos technology allows for virtual 'sound objects' to be placed on top of the sound bed through multiple arrangements of timbre-matched speakers which mask the exact source. The Atmos sound designer can in effect model scenes as 3D maps of phantom sound sources, which can be directed around the theatre like a spotlight with varying levels of intensity.



Wired for sound: Dolby Atmos places the audience inside a 3D soundscape

The system's range and appeal were powerfully demonstrated in Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* (2013). The Oscar-winning Atmos mix, developed by Dolby during the film's production as something of a stress-testing exercise, situates the spectator within the characters' sensorium through subtle integration of musical cues with dialogue (which emanates directly from the headsets of the onscreen performers), the rhythmic throb of their breathing and heartbeats, and the swelling roar of the space debris that hurtles through the ether around them.

There are other benefits too, beyond the ability to shift sounds within the listening environment. How often do we complain of murky mixes in which the actors' lines are drowned out by bombastic scores? Atmos allows the musical accompaniment to move to the side-surround speakers, enveloping the theatrical space more completely while freeing up the screen speakers for dialogue. More generally, in terms of frequency range and clarity, it far surpasses previous systems.

Inevitably, kitting out venues with the necessary hardware costs money. Initially, Dolby quoted an average of \$25,000-\$30,000 for an upgrade, although this figure has now come down substantially and depends on auditorium size. Still, the take-up by UK exhibitors has been relatively slow: there are only 13 Atmos screens across the country, with a further two in Ireland. While customers are just about willing to pay the surcharge for 3D, the prospect of superior sound might not be enough to lure audiences if the installation costs were reflected in higher ticket prices.

In an echo of the expansion of both 3D

What actually appears on screen is, for many cinemagoers, less and less the thing that defines the theatrical event

and 4DX, it is emerging markets such as Asia that seem to hint at its future role, with chains in countries such as China and Indonesia embracing the technology. In these territories, which have enjoyed a marked expansion in the number of screens in recent years and where the multiplex is seen as the primary point of consumption for new releases, audiences seem more willing to pay a premium for the best cinema experience.

The increasing number of post-production studios handling the system points to a future in which advanced sound designs are no longer the preserve of major studios. India is leading the charge outside North America, with the 3D post-converted rerelease of Shankar Shanmugham's *Sivaji* (2007) in 2012 the first non-Hollywood title to receive an Atmos remix; a number of new Bollywood titles have been conceived with such presentation in mind. A core strength of the system is that it need not add to the post-production workflow. Major releases are now routinely mixed for Atmos, and 7.1 or 5.1 mixes can be derived from this default standard at no extra cost.

Still, how far Atmos will become the sound production norm is open to question, as is the rate at which the exhibition sector catches up. Dolby faces competition in the immersive audio market from the Auro-3D system, raising the spectre of a format war in which the biggest potential losers will be exhibitors who have invested in the wrong technology. In the meantime, home theatre Atmos technology is already on the market, with the first Blu-ray releases with Dolby Atmos mixes appearing last year.

Still, it is in the cinema that the system truly shines, expanding the medium's storytelling potential beyond the screen. The risk is that viewers unable or unwilling to submit themselves to this far subtler method than 3D of pushing cinema into the next dimension may never know what they are missing. 🎧

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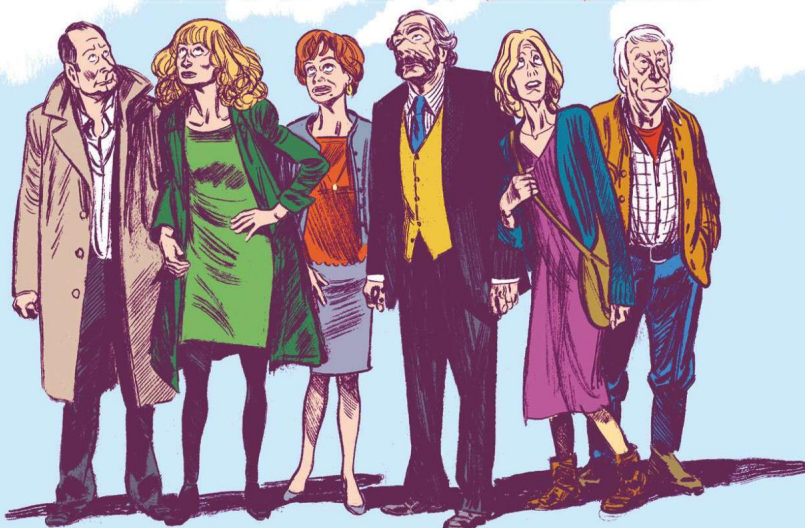


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FRENCH CINEMA SPECIAL

Over the following 15 pages, **Ginette Vincendeau** traces the growing visibility of ethnic-minority actors on French screens (p.22), **Thirza Wakefield** talks to Céline Sciamma about her coming-of-age drama *Girlhood* (p.28), **Jonathan Romney** unravels François Ozon's *The New Girlfriend* (p.30), and **Neil McGlone** discusses metafiction and ageing with *Clouds of Sils Maria* director Olivier Assayas (p.34). **Introduction by Nick James**



It's been a while since *Sight & Sound* turned to French cinema for a thematic focus, a fact which perhaps indicates a weakening in recent years in its

impact abroad. Of course the departure from the scene of Eric Rohmer, Claude Chabrol and Alain Resnais is merely natural, but it does point up how much the assumption that France is always at the centre of the cinephile debate has depended on the endurance of those *nouvelle vague* figures. Another hindrance to success is the difficulty

French filmmakers have had in shaking off the ghosts of '68. The cultural aftermath of that extraordinary moment in French history seems, for almost half a century, to have weighed heavily against the emergence of a significantly fresh cinema without any ties to those events. However, given the excitement with which Thierry Fremaux talked about the rich choice of French films in his announcement of this year's Cannes programme, all that may be about to change.

In the meantime, of course, terrific filmmakers from France have continued to flourish, and we've followed the careers of the likes of Juliette Binoche, Olivier Assayas, Céline Sciamma and François Ozon with

devoted interest. These are talents at the top of their game, whose films investigate the trials of identity and desire today in intriguing and complex ways. We can also see evidence of new talents breaking through in films such as *The Dorkels* (see review, page 58). It's still the case that if you go to see a film from France, you're usually guaranteed a certain adult sophistication. And part of that sophistication, in this post-*Charlie Hebdo* moment – as Ginette Vincendeau describes overleaf – has seen the increasing use of actors from widely different ethnic backgrounds, as exemplified by Sciamma's thrilling *Girlhood*. French cinema is betting on the future again and so we're cheering it on. **S**



Clouds of Sils Maria



The New Girlfriend



Girlhood

MINORITY REPORT

In the 20 years that separates 'La Haine' from 'Girlhood', a great deal has changed in the representation of multiculturalism in French cinema, and after decades of marginalising non-white segments of the French population, local films are finally engaging with them

By Ginette Vincendeau



This month sees the 20th anniversary of *La Haine* and the release of *Girlhood* (*Bande de filles*), the two films book-ending two decades of increasingly intense scrutiny of what multiculturalism means in contemporary France, and prompting the

question: what has changed in French cinema in the meantime? Like Mathieu Kassovitz's 1995 hit, Céline Sciamma's film features a group of rebellious youth from the deprived Parisian suburbs. In both cases their ethnicity is a factor, though barely articulated in terms of identity, let alone conflict. Yet, beyond the obvious fact that *La Haine*'s male trio and masculine focus has been replaced by a feminist accent on a 'band of girls', a lot has changed in the screen representation of the 'difficult' *banlieues*, as well as on the wider race and ethnicity front.

In 2014 alone, apart from *Girlhood*, the release of *Samba* (the tragicomic story of an illegal immigrant played by Omar Sy), as well as the massive success of the brazenly politically incorrect *Serial (Bad) Weddings* (*Qu'est-ce qu'on a fait au bon Dieu?*), with 12 million tickets sold, show that after decades of marginalising or ignoring non-white segments of the French population, French films are finally engaging with them. In their widely different genres, these three films run the gamut of societal changes in contemporary France –





GANG OF FOUR
The cast of Céline Sciamma's *Girlhood*, which offers a feminist spin on the *film de banlieue* as it follows the growing pains of 16-year-old Marieme (Karidja Touré, second from right) in Paris

Repeatedly, and understandably, the filmmakers and actors in question here resist being seen in terms of their ethnic origins for fear of being ghettoised



immigration, unemployment and economic crisis, mixed marriages and gender roles, racism, integration and national identity; this is a country with six million immigrants and a similar number of second-generation people of immigrant origins, and the highest proportion of Muslims in Western Europe (7.5 per cent). The films also come out against a background of renewed racist violence and the continued rise of the far-right Front National. Cinematically speaking, this is a trend that has been gathering speed since the start of the millennium and which the vagaries of the international distribution of French films may have hidden from view.

A BLAST OF FRESH AIR

Large numbers of (male) actors from ethnic-minority backgrounds now feature in the pantheon of French stardom. Alongside Omar Sy (of Mauritanian and Senegalese descent), there are many with North African origins, such as Jamel Debbouze, Dany Boon, Kad Merad and Gad Elmaleh. Thanks to comic mega-hits such as *Asterix and Obelix Meet Cleopatra* (*Astérix & Obélix: Mission Cléopâtre*, 2002) for Debbouze, *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* (2008) for Boon and Merad, and *Untouchable* (*Intouchables*, 2011) for Sy, they are among the best-paid and most popular actors in France. This state of affairs owes a lot to the success of television stand-up comedy in the 1990s, especially to the example of Debbouze on the Canal+ pay channel. His programmes enabled minority groups to access

mainstream media, both through some degree of affirmative action and the trickle-down effect of television stardom. For instance, Sy was part of the TV comic duo 'Omar & Fred', with white comic Fred Testot. Others, such as Merad also featured in – frequently mixed-race – acts who later found their way into film comedy. In parallel, the box-office triumph of Luc Besson's *Taxi* franchise (1998, 2000, 2003 and 2007) and of the Jewish comic trilogy *La Vérité si je mens!* (1997, 2001 and 2012) propelled actors such as Samy Naceri, Richard Anconina, Vincent Elbaz and Gilbert Melki into the limelight.

Another source of change has been the legacy of *beur* (a slang rendition of 'Arab' denoting someone born in France of North African parents) and *banlieue* cinema of the 1980s and 1990s in demonstrating the viability and relevance of multicultural stories in both mainstream and auteur cinema. Former *cinéma beur* directors Merzak Allouache and Rachid Bouchareb went on to make big-budget films, giving starring roles to actors hitherto confined to marginal parts, in comedy (*Chouchou*, 2003) and historical drama (*Days of Glory/Indigènes*, 2006), while actor Abdellatif Kechiche forged an exemplary career in auteur cinema, directing films such as *Games of Love and Chance* (*L'Esquive*, 2003) and *Couscous* (*La Graine et Le Mulet*, 2007).

Repeatedly, and understandably, the filmmakers and actors in question resist being seen in terms of their ethnic origins for fear of being ghettoised. Echoing many of his colleagues, Sy declared in a recent interview for the release of *Samba*, "I am not a black actor, I am an actor!" Yet ethnicity is undeniably a relevant factor in his, and others', trajectories. Conversely, from comic mega-hits to small-budget films, French cinema has been revitalised through the influx of personnel from ethnic-minority backgrounds.

COMIC RELIEF

Comedy historically has dominated the French box office, so it is significant in terms of impact that, alongside American-inspired romcom, the most successful

RISING STAR

Omar Sy (below left, with François Cluzet in 2011's *Untouchable*, and below right with Charlotte Gainsbourg in 2014's *Samba*) recently asserted, 'I am not a black actor, I am an actor'; Mathieu Kassovitz's 1995 *banlieue* classic *La Haine* (above)



new sub-genre is what I call the ‘comedy of ethnic integration’. This refers to feel-good movies in which identity is affirmed and exaggerated stereotypically, provoking conflicts that are then resolved in a tale of social harmony. Also characteristic of these films is the presence of actors – and in some cases directors and producers – from ethnic-minority backgrounds, though I should add that women have so far remained marginal to this trend.

Topics range from masquerading under a different identity (the *La Vérité si je mens!* trilogy, *L’Italien* in 2010 and *Mohamed Dubois* in 2012), comic thrillers in which both criminals and the police are ethnically mixed (*Beur sur la ville* and *Halal police d’état* in 2011 and *De l’autre côté du périph* in 2012), and films that revolve around the (un-)willing return ‘home’ (*Paris à tout prix* and *Né quelque part* in 2013). But the most common stories confront starkly divergent groups, again to offer a harmonious resolution: *Mauvaise foi* in 2006 (Jew vs Arab), *Neuilly sa mère!* in 2009 (poor Arab vs white grand-bourgeois), *Tout ce qui brille* in 2010 (Jewish and *beur* girlfriends – a rare feminine example), *Untouchable* (poor black vs white aristocrat), and *Serial (Bad) Weddings* (Chinese, Arab, Jew and African vs white French Catholic). Needless to say, while most of these films are box-office hits, they are mostly below the radar of cinephile critics. However, the magnitude of their triumph means that *Untouchable* and *Serial (Bad) Weddings* generated massive debate, illustrating the ideological complexities of the issues involved, both on screen and in real life.

Untouchable did exceptionally well around the globe (except in the UK), becoming the highest grossing French-language film outside France; an American remake is in production, despite *Variety*’s accusation of “Uncle Tom racism”. *Untouchable* does indeed deploy racist stereotypes in its depiction of Driss (Sy) as a *banlieue* delinquent turned fun-loving (and dance-king) carer for a paralysed rich white man. But the fairytale message of humanity transcending racial barriers clearly trumped the clichés in the public mind. Arguably too, Sy’s charismatic performance enables him to appropriate racist stereotypes in a way that is empowering, or at least affirms the impact of self-parody, while his resulting stardom gave him unprecedented A-list status for a black man in French media culture.

Serial (Bad) Weddings, directed by Philippe de Chauveron, stars white comics Christian Clavier and Chantal Lauby (graduates of 1970s *café-théâtre*) as a Catholic bourgeois couple who, horrified that their three eldest daughters have married French men of Jewish, Arab and Chinese heritage, are determined to stop their fourth daughter from marrying a black African man. The husbands in question are embodied by the younger generation of male actors from ethnic-minority backgrounds, including as Chao, the Franco-Chinese husband, stand-up comic Frédéric Chau, whose act denounces French racism while mocking Chinese accents in French. However, in contrast to *Untouchable*’s quasi-universal appeal, *Serial (Bad) Weddings* was turned down by British and American distributors because, according to the *Daily Telegraph*, this “racist French hit” is “too politically incorrect for UK and US audiences”. In France too, the film has been read in terms of its political incorrectness, except mostly to celebrate it as another “French exception”. While the film obviously mocks the central



DRIVING FORCE
Comic thriller *Beur sur la ville* (2011, top) saw roles for actors of mixed ethnicities as criminals and police, while the *Taxi* franchise propelled Samy Naceri (above, behind Frédéric Diefenthal, in *Taxi 2*) into the limelight

WAR AND PEACE
French cinema has seen an increasing number of roles for ethnic-minority actors, including (below, clockwise from top left) *Mauvaise foi* (2006), *Days of Glory* (2006), *Couscous* (2007) and *Serial (Bad) Weddings* (2014)



couple's racist suspicion of other cultures, it does so through the reiteration of racist stereotypes (associating the Arab with terrorism, mocking Jewish circumcision, etc), and then targets racism within every group: the Jew and the Arab are at each other's throats, the Senegalese father-in-law is virulently anti-white, and so on. Chauveron said his aim was to show contemporary society as a "big messy identity mash-up", but a joyful one in which harmony is possible. Conflicts and reconciliations are illustrated, among other things, in a series of meal scenes, including a Christmas dinner with halal and kosher turkey, and a gastronomic restaurant meal where the white and black fathers-in-law bond. French black activist Patrick Lozès praised the film for its multiple targeting of racism, attributing its massive reach to the fact that it "succeeds in addressing both racists and those who abhor racism".

Apart from the comic achievements of its narrative and performers, *Serial (Bad) Weddings* illustrates particularly clearly what is at stake in the success of the French comedies of ethnic integration. The films offer comic declensions on the French concept of citizenship rooted in individual equality within a secular state – with religion confined to the private sphere – and the concomitant suspicion of 'communities'. The resounding singing of 'La Marseillaise' by the ethnically diverse sons-in-law echoes a line in *Mauvaise foi* that the child of the Arab-Jewish couple will be "not Muslim, nor Jewish, but French"; many other examples could be quoted. But for such consensus to be achieved, some things have to give. The first is religion. A harmonious conclusion is possible because religious differences are briefly invoked and then immediately dismissed. As the Catholic newspaper *Témoignage Chrétien* put it, *Serial (Bad) Weddings* "makes people laugh with religion without talking about religion". But in this film as in others, including those set in Muslim backgrounds, particularly conspicuous is the absence of Islam.

Another noticeable erasure is class. With the exception of the comic thrillers, where working-class identity figures as delinquency, the films focus on middle-class backgrounds. By embedding the ethnically diverse characters in affluent communities, the comedies make integration plausible while they avoid tackling both the exclusion of minorities and white racism (the Front National flourishes in deprived areas). The somewhat utopian view of ethnic integration offered by the comedies is thus not so much false as partial, while they embrace

the optimistic and transformative nature of the genre. One might assume that dramas turn a more 'realistic' gaze on the issue of ethnicity, but the picture there is equally complicated.

FEMINISING THE FILM DE BANLIEUE

Since 1995 French cinema has been saluted for returning to social and political issues, with the renaissance of documentary and the socially oriented filmmakers of the Young French Cinema, such as Erick Zonca, Bruno Dumont, Philippe Jolivet, Sandrine Veysset and Mathieu Kassovitz. Focusing on social exclusion and identity, they inevitably touch on France's multi-ethnic population. This trend has accelerated in the last few years: *35 Shots of Rum* (35 *Rhums*, 2008), *A Prophet* (*Un prophète*, 2009), *Our Children* (*A perdre la raison*, 2012), *The Past* (*Le Passé*, 2013), *Je ne suis pas mort* (2012), *Gare du Nord* (2013) and *Hippocrates* (*Hippocrate*, 2014) feature a – usually male – protagonist of marked ethnic origins. This trend too produced new stars, in particular Roschdy Zem, Reda Kateb and Tahar Rahim, who may not command the inflated salaries of the comic stars, but who have become prominent nevertheless.

Central to narratives of multicultural France are the Paris *banlieues*, in which large communities of people of immigrant descent live, and for which *La Haine* is the representational benchmark. The film's enormous impact derived from its harnessing of the stylistic tropes of American cinema (Martin Scorsese and Spike Lee in particular) to the social malaise affecting its mixed-race central trio. Jewish Vinz (Vincent Cassel), black Hubert (Hubert Koundé) and *beur* Saïd (Saïd Taghmaoui) embody an embattled, no-hope generation left on the margins to drug-dealing and clashes with the police. The film points the finger at white racism, but the ethnic identity of the heroes is not a source of conflict among themselves. Despite its violent denouement, *La Haine* still belongs to the 1990s when a black-blanc-beur harmony seemed possible. To say the least, the social situation referenced in the film has not improved since 1995. *La Haine's* tenth anniversary was marked by the November 2005 riots mirroring those in the film; others followed, among them in Villiers-le-Bel in 2007 and Trappes in 2013.

It is striking that, while this worsening situation is routinely documented in the press and on television, its cinematic footprint is more subdued. There has been a trickle of *banlieue* social dramas but none with the resonance of *La Haine*. The topic morphed on the one hand

Since 'La Haine' the *banlieue* social drama has morphed into genre filmmaking – the action thrillers 'District 13' and 'District 13: Ultimatum' – and comedies

THE OUTSIDERS
A number of recent French films have focused on issues of social exclusion, inevitably touching on the country's multi-ethnic population, such as Claire Denis's *35 Shots of Rum* in 2008 (below left) and Jacques Audiard's *A Prophet* in 2009 (below right)





PARIS IS BURNING
The iniquitous social situation depicted in *La Haine* is still a very live issue in France, resulting in numerous riots in the years since its release, including those in Villiers-le-Bel (far left) in 2007 and Trappes (left) in 2013

into genre filmmaking – the action thrillers *District 13* (*Banlieue 13*, 2004) and *District 13: Ultimatum* (*Banlieue 13: Ultimatum*, 2013) – or comedies, as discussed above. The sense of generic fatigue is evident in their parodic tone: the *District* films are cartoon-like, and at one point in comedy *Porn in the Hood* (*Les Kâïra*, 2012), the heroes sit in a bus stop called ‘Square Kassoovitz’. On the other hand there is auteur cinema, including Kechiche’s *Games of Love and Chance*. Here, while the setting is omnipresent, with its familiar concrete towers, the narrative interest shifts to a romance between a young *beur* and a white girl involved in a school play. The power of Marivaux’s language to transcend ethnic barriers makes for beautiful performances, but hardly typifies dysfunctional *banlieue* schools. Like Jacques Tati, Jean-Luc Godard or Jean-Claude Brisseau before him, Kechiche appropriates the *banlieue* to his auteurist vision. This is also what Céline Sciamma does with the latest, high-profile *banlieue* film, *Girlhood*.

YOUTH IN REVOLT

Sciamma made her name with two quirky tales of sexual awakenings: *Water Lilies* (*Naissance de pieuvres*) in 2007 and *Tomboy* in 2011. *Girlhood* similarly narrates a coming of age, the journey of Marieme/Vic (Karidja Touré) towards independence, which Sciamma describes as moving towards “a room of her own”; indeed Marieme rejects school and a job as a cleaner, escapes from the clutches of her brutal older brother and of drug boss Abou (Djibril Gueye), but also leaves behind those she loved: her ‘band of girls’ and her nice boyfriend Ismaël (Idrissa Diabaté). The end finds her alone, but determined. This *Bildungsroman* intersects with the grammar of the *banlieue* film from which *Girlhood* borrows many familiar aspects: concrete buildings, walkways and esplanades frame characters whose clothes and language label them as *banlieue* youth. Their ‘problem’ group identity is suggested in a shopping scene in the Forum des Halles and when they dance noisily in the metro. The obligatory ride on the RER train and the hazy presence of the Eiffel Tower in the distance further mark the *banlieue*’s actual and metaphorical distance from inner Paris. Last but not least, the film is ethnically inflected. Key to its visual texture and impact is the fact that Marieme, her friends and everyone around her are black. Yet, despite recognising her casting as ‘political’, Sciamma adopts an intensely aestheticising gaze. *Girlhood* is by her own admission an ‘impressionistic’ tale of youth and her interest is in the choreography of the girls’ bodies, the energy of their performances (dancing, fighting), the light on

their skin. She admits being fascinated by bands of black girls in real life, their “energy, their way of speaking”. Claiming an “intersectional” position, Sciamma however makes her sexual politics clear: this film is centred on young women appropriating space in a male-dominated world and demanding the right to their own desire.

The debates that have raged around *Girlhood* in France fascinatingly reproduce the film’s political-aesthetic split. Cinephile and mainstream reviewers admired the charismatic performances by the non-professional cast and the originality of the *mise en scène*, while ideological critics indicted the film as the racist, exoticising fantasy of a privileged white filmmaker. Unusually, attention was paid to suburban audience reactions, including from black female spectators. There, the representation of women drew approval for showing “girls valorising each other because no one else will do it”, but were rejected by others for perpetuating the image of black women as victims of oppression and for demonising black men. At a screening in the working-class suburb of Montreuil, Sciamma was taken to task for her racial politics but insisted her film had no “message” and should be read in purely formal terms. Yet this seems disingenuous. She makes Marieme deliberately play for France at a video game with her brother and calls her ‘Vic’ when she joins the gang. The latter is a reference to the Sophie Marceau character in the 1980 classic French teen film *The Party* (*La Boum*); as Sciamma put it, “Vic in *La Boum* was the French little *fiancée* of the 1980s; we were trying to find the French little *fiancée* of today,” adding that in Marieme she was trying to portray “the trajectory of the eternal young girl” (incidentally a vision adopted by the English-language title of the film).

Class and religion are as absent from *Girlhood* as they are from *Serial (Bad) Weddings*; similarly, class boundaries in *Samba* are blithely ignored in the romantic pairing of Sy’s illegal immigrant with Charlotte Gainsbourg’s white middle-class executive. Whether *Girlhood* is evidence of colour-blindness, anti-racism or imperialist appropriation will continue to be debated. But Sciamma’s film confirms that the vastly different French films that engage with multicultural France share in their representations a specific French approach in formal terms and in their conception of the citizen that appears to transcend ethnic boundaries. But as the debates rumble on, one thing that has certainly changed for the better is the fact that ethnic-minority actors have become a force to be reckoned with in French cinema. **S**

GIRLS IN THE HOOD

Céline Sciamma's *'Girlhood'* paints a complex portrait of a young black teenager in the banlieues, part of the director's filmic project to portray the multiplicity of what it is to be female

By Thirza Wakefield



With her first two films – *Water Lilies* (2007) and *Tomboy* (2011) – Céline Sciamma sought to explore the complexity and range of female experience in

contemporary France. *Water Lilies* examined the sexual coming of age of three teenage girls in a Paris suburb, while *Tomboy* focused on a ten-year-old girl who passes for a boy after moving to a new neighbourhood and starts up an ambiguous friendship with another girl. But while both were clearly representative of aspects of modern teenage girls' lives, Sciamma seems intent on making a bolder claim for her latest film. "With *Girlhood*..." she says, her eyebrow cocked as she waits out a pregnant pause, "I decided that French young women today are this girl."

The girl in question is Marieme (Karidja Touré), the film's central character, a black teenager living in the *banlieues* beyond the

rim of Paris's Boulevard Périphérique. With her single mother (Binta Diop) working nights as a cleaner, Marieme is left to parent her younger sisters and fend off her bullying older brother (Cyril Mendy), who watches over her like a hawk. She passes out of the school system, forced out by the limited prospects offered to her as much as walking away, into the company of a gang of three fiercely independent girls – the leader Lady (Assa Sylla) and her two best friends Fily (Mariétou Touré) and Adiatou (Lindsay Karamoh) – until difficult circumstances rouse her to redefine herself again.

When I meet Sciamma following *Girlhood*'s UK premiere at the 2014 BFI London Film Festival, comparisons between her film and Richard Linklater's *Boyhood* seem inevitable. But since *Girlhood* doesn't share the same childhood to adulthood narrative arc and the films' similarities really begin and end with their his-and-hers epithets, it's surprising that Sciamma herself should seize on the association. "What is *Boyhood*?" she asks. "It's a white, middle-class young man, having average dreams, average thoughts."

Sciamma is a calm, intelligent interviewee, if a little withdrawn to begin with. She has that French sang-froid, with languid movements that suggest absolute assurance.

I go for a film when I feel it has a strong fictional potential – and the fact that there's the need to look at it, a political need

She responds levelly and thoughtfully, and is generous with her answers, notwithstanding the frustration of having to discuss her work in a foreign language. ("I'm sorry; I lack vocabulary," she says. "I was a lousy student in English, but I lived abroad for two years in Singapore as a kid, and so..." And so she clearly has an excellent memory.) When she gives a brief answer, it is because a brief answer will suffice.

One suspects she doesn't really believe there's anything to be gained from equating *Girlhood* with *Boyhood*, that she has no real argument with Linklater. She chose her title before ever hearing of *Boyhood*, and likes it better than the French *Bande de filles*. And it isn't the first time the filmmaker has looked to the English language for a title. She did so with *Tomboy*, rejecting the French equivalent – *garçon manqué* – as too pejorative in its literal meaning: 'failed boy'.

But since she sees *Boyhood* as a fundamentally mainstream tale, I ask how conscious she is of what has and hasn't already been made, and whether her filmmaking is a deliberate corrective to absences in contemporary cinema. "I go for a film when I feel there's a connection between something I want to tell – the fact that it has a strong fictional potential – and the fact that there's the need to look at it, a political need, a representational need... an intimate urgency, and a collective one, and it's in that order, you know?"

Sciamma has come in for criticism for inferring that Marieme's racially



Dancing queens: the memorable scene of the girls miming to Rhianna's 'Diamonds' is a key moment of bonding in Céline Sciamma's *Girlhood*

conditioned experience could ever be a catch-all for the general teenage experience. Sciamma is a white woman, who, in her own words, does not “effectively” know her characters. By linking her film – conspicuous by its difference to anything else in the marketplace – to *Boyhood*, she is diminishing the singularity of this highly visible film about a low-visibility subject: “They are not often looked at, black girls.”

But it is clear that Sciamma means her film to be universal in the sense that Marieme’s story covers all the bases – much as she hoped *Tomboy* would strike a chord with the transgender viewer and cisgendered girls uncomfortable with conventional notions of femininity, as well as audiences of all sexual orientations. But in the case of *Girlhood*, Sciamma doesn’t seem interested in detailing the reasons why a black girl from a low-income family should be able to speak for all girls her age, turning the argument on its head by saying, “Why shouldn’t she?”

Sciamma writes out of “strong identification” with her characters, scripting from start to finish alone, and as the focus of all her films is on the female, ‘girlhood’ would serve as an apt umbrella-banner for the films she’s made: a trilogy only in retrospect, because she is adamant that this is the last film she’ll make about adolescence with a non-professional cast: “I don’t know what I’m going to do next. I just know that I’m going to stop... I have to be a grown-up now. I want to work with actors – I mean, actors who chose to be actors.”

If the triptych was unpremeditated, Sciamma is at least sympathetic to the term: “*Water Lilies* was about the beginning of teenage-hood; *Tomboy*, the end of childhood; and this one is about the end of teenage-hood.” In these transitional phases in the young life of a girl she has found her “strong fictional potential”, and feels the visual medium of film is particularly suited to their expression. Her films are fairly muted – *Girlhood*, the most talkative to date – and their focus, as she’s stated before, is on the ‘how’ rather than ‘why’ of her characters’ behaviour.

Cinema befits her subjects in still another way. Marieme, like *Tomboy*’s young protagonist Laure/Mickaël, observes the world attentively in a way that encourages audiences to look closer and more meditatively at Sciamma’s characters. Their looking is, in part, a condition of their marginality, and inexorably connected to desire. Marieme wishes to be assimilated into the freethinking, free-acting girl group she admires. In a key scene in which the girls mime to Rihanna’s pop-track ‘Diamonds’ – “The scene I most fantasised about,” says Sciamma, admitting that it was “very choreographed” despite its apparent freeness – Marieme, islanded on the



Céline Sciamma: ‘With *Girlhood*, I decided that French young women today are this girl’

hotel-room bed, watches her friends adoringly as they dance in front of her, before, in a pivotal moment, standing up to join them.

Sciamma’s films show us that looking – in spite of the prevalence of the male gaze – is a feminine proclivity, and with *Girlhood* she takes the idea one step further. In a memorably charged night-time sequence, Marieme stalks with intent to the home of her boyfriend Ismaël. Waking him up, she has him take off his clothes, and turn over in the bed at her bidding. He does as he’s told as she watches. “It’s powerful because we never see it,” Sciamma says. “But it’s crazy that we never see it. People tell me it’s an inversion. I say, ‘Yeah, it’s an inversion – of how we represent heterosexual sex onscreen.’ But it’s not an inversion of how it actually happens, I hope. It would be so sad otherwise. I’m not a pro at heterosexual sex, but come on!”

If representing heterosexual sex is a first for Sciamma, so is shooting in CinemaScope with an all-black cast in a tech-literate setting, with mobile phones and viral video. But it’s through these firsts that *Girlhood* becomes the crowning culmination of the three films, whose common concern is the multiplicity

of what it is to be female. *Girlhood*’s girls are complex, capable of seemingly contradictory behaviours: innocent and adept at intimidation, playful and violent, loyal and competitive, juvenile and maternal. Was the film meant to be a comment on cinema’s apparent need for female characters to be consolidated or archetypal? “It’s absolutely the centre of the project – to try to make plural portraits of the same girl, being in contradiction, in paradox, and not being one thing. [In other films] with girl-characters there’s one energy, one language. I wanted them to speak several languages, because they do.” The motive of the film, its “political project”, is to “to fight this idea of assignation”.

Marieme, more than any of Sciamma’s other characters, positively embodies this resistance. By the film’s open-ended conclusion, which sees Marieme exit the screen – not by walking away from us into an affirmative future, but laterally across the frame – she is wearing “the braids of childhood, the make-up of womanhood, and the [masculine] clothes of boyhood, and she’s everything and nothing. She has to become.”

LABYRINTH



François Ozon's 'The New Girlfriend', an ingenious, twisty tale of love, death and sexual desire, has immense fun undermining viewers' expectations, starting off as a Chabrol-style thriller before morphing into a hybrid that merges elements of romance, farce, melodrama and even musical

By Jonathan Romney



François Ozon's latest film *The New Girlfriend* (*Une nouvelle amie*) is an ingenious, devious entertainment – but also a serious inquiry into the themes it addresses. What those themes are, I'm reluctant to reveal, given the surprise that Ozon springs early on; the less you know in advance, the more you'll enjoy the film. That said, there's no way to discuss *The New Girlfriend* in any depth without disclosing all. So I'll only note that a spoiler warning is required in bold type – although ideally, it ought to be scrawled across the pages of *Sight & Sound* in screaming red lipstick.

Ozon's opening misdirects us expertly. We see close-ups of a woman's lips, eyes and cheeks, as make-up is applied, then white stocking tops being pulled up. Everything suggests an eroticised wedding ritual – except

that the woman, Laura (Isild Le Besco), is dead and being dressed for her funeral. At this point, not least because the opening credits announce that Ozon's source is a story by thriller doyenne Ruth Rendell, we think we're in for a tale of death, murder and obsession – an impression reinforced by echoes of Bernard Herrmann in Philippe Rombi's score. At the funeral, Laura's friend Claire (Anaïs Demoustier) recalls how their bond started at school as love at first sight. Flashbacks show us the friends running joyfully through childhood, then reaching their teenage years, with Laura becoming a glamorous boy magnet, to the chagrin of shy Claire. Laura marries a gauche young man, David (Romain Duris), who becomes the father of her baby Lucie, while Claire settles down with handsome, conventional Gilles (Raphaël Personnaz).

All this establishes erotic tensions between the two women, from which we expect a thriller to emerge. But once Ozon springs his big surprise, what we get instead

ILLUSTRATION BY ANDY SMITH

OF PASSION



is a teasing hybrid that merges elements of romance, farce, melodrama and even musical, with a complex psychosexual undercurrent. Arguably Ozon's most overtly Freudian film, this is also his most cunningly constructed, and his most playfully subversive of the sexual codes of mainstream French cinema.

So here's the twist: one day, Claire walks in on the newly widowed David to find him wearing his wife's clothes and a blonde wig. Baby Lucie needs a mother, he says, and Laura's clothes reassure the child. Claire objects, not inaccurately, that he's really dressing to please himself. She's initially horrified by her discovery, but finds herself increasingly drawn to this hitherto unsuspected side of David – and to the female self he comes to exult in, a glamorous femme fatale (trenchcoat, scarf, dark glasses and all) named Virginia. As the pair draw closer, the questions mount up: is Claire attracted to David the man or to his female alter ego, or is she, through them, at last fully expressing her desire for Laura?

Matters take a decisive turn when David/Virginia and Claire spend a surreptitious weekend together, during which they visit – both as women – a gay club. The highlight there is a routine by drag act Eva Carlton (Bruno Pérard) lip-synching to a song by Nicole Croisille,

'Une femme avec toi' ('A Woman with You'), about love making the singer truly a woman at last. This routine ends with Pérard slipping off his dress to reveal a man's body that also represents a figure of idealised femaleness. This paradox hits all Claire's hitherto dormant erotic nerve centres; after enjoying admiring looks from a young lesbian on the dance floor, she imagines sleeping with Laura, then fantasises about their two husbands getting it on. Once the polysexual Pandora's box is opened, there's no shutting it.

The New Girlfriend is rich in echoes for admirers of a director who, if he seems confoundingly dissimilar from film to film, nevertheless has a more consistent thematic core than most. Many of Ozon's characters only discover their own desire through the desire of others. It was a key theme in *Swimming Pool* (2002), about an older woman responding to a younger one's free-spirit sexuality; in his knowing fiction about fiction, *In the House* (2012); and in the glossily problematic *Jeune et Jolie* (2013), about a young woman packaging herself as an opaque object of desire for male customers. The theme was also associated with cross-dressing in Ozon's 1996 short *A Summer Dress* – which likewise features a hyper-camp lip-synch routine – in which the teenage hero gets seduced

TWO BY TWO

Claire (Anaïs Demoustier, above, left) is left to console David (Romain Duris, above, left), the grieving husband of her best friend Laura (Isild Le Besco, above with Demoustier), when Laura dies soon after giving birth



'The New Girlfriend' is at once one of Ozon's lightest films, in terms of its narrative pleasure, and one of his darkest and deepest, in terms of its psychosexual complexity



➡ on the beach by a young woman, then cycles home in her dress, which instantly unfreezes the sexual impasse with his male lover.

The cross-dressing theme of *The New Girlfriend* brings Ozon very close to the territory of Pedro Almodóvar, who has also adapted Rendell in his *Live Flesh* (1997) – although in terms of gender and of surprise body transformations, Ozon's film is closer to Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In* (2011), which also revolves around an *outré* twist. It's worth nothing, though, that Ozon has taken Rendell's vignette into stranger areas than the original suggests. Her story doesn't involve death until its rather desultory shock ending, David's wife barely figures (Ozon seems to have devised his film's dear departed with Otto Preminger's *Laura* in mind), and Rendell's heroine is defined as much by her horror of men as by an attraction to women, or men-as-women.

The New Girlfriend is at once one of Ozon's lightest films, in terms of its narrative pleasure and subversive mischief involved (betokened by the director's gleefully seedy cameo), and one of his darkest and deepest, in terms of its psychosexual complexity. One source of that complexity is its casting. We're used to seeing Romain Duris play assorted shades of confident maleness, most recently in mainstream films *Heartbreaker* and retro comedy *Populaire*. Ozon has him playing totally against type, transforming from the mild, nebbishy David into the increasingly magnificent Virginia, radiating euphoric delight at his/her transformation – a metamorphosis that's all the more fun because of the discrepancy of seeing Duris's distinctive jutting jaw and toothy grin showing through the mask of Virginia's glamour. (You almost expect him to say at any moment, "Tonight, Matthew, I'm going to be Fanny Ardant.")

Ozon's other inspired stroke is casting Anaïs Demoustier, who for several years has been slowly emerging as a major asset of French cinema. A reliable

supporting player in films by Christophe Honoré, Rebecca Zlotowski *et al*, Demoustier excelled as the lead in Isabelle Czajka's *L'Année suivante* (2006) and *Living on Love Alone* (2010), was the best thing about Malgorzata Szumowska's glossy prostitution drama *Elles* (2011), and starred last year in Pascale Ferran's bold but misconceived *Bird People*. Like *Elles*, *The New Girlfriend* plays on the 27-year-old Demoustier's youthful, even innocent looks, which makes for an explosive effect when the seemingly demure Claire unleashes her libido. While Demoustier appears to play the muted 'straight woman' to Duris's comic diva, she's actually working in a very complex register, subtly evoking Claire's layers of confusion, uncertainty and denial. DP Pascal Marti highlights the artless 'naturalness' which is Demoustier's trademark, by bringing out the largely make-up-free tones of her fresh, freckled skin. But that *ingénue* quality itself emerges, through Claire's awakening, as an artifice – a role the character has always performed to hide her own secret inner woman. It takes an actress as natural as Demoustier to remind us that in the everyday identity that people show the world, there's nothing natural after all.

Jonathan Romney: The pleasure of *The New Girlfriend* depends very much on a surprise, which makes the film very hard to write about.

François Ozon: You always want people to come as virgins. You'd have to get journalists to sign a secrecy clause, or do what Hitchcock did with *Psycho* and say, "Don't talk about what happens." I realise these days it's not possible. With *Ricky* [Ozon's 2009 film in which the surprise reveal is a flying baby], we made a mistake by showing the baby flying in the trailer. So this time, I said right away that we shouldn't see Virginia in the trailer.

JR: The start of *The New Girlfriend* makes us expect a thriller à la Hitchcock or Chabrol, which is completely different to the film we actually get.

FO: The prelude isn't in Ruth Rendell's story, but for me

it was very important to the set-up. I realised that films about transvestites need something if the viewer's going to get them, because cross-dressing is something that a lot of people don't understand. In American comedies like *Some Like It Hot*, *Tootsie* or *Victor Victoria*, people start cross-dressing not out of desire but because of their external situation – they're actors out of work, or they're running from the Mafia. But afterwards, they start to enjoy it, and so does the viewer.

The most perverse thing in my film is that David is in mourning; he says, very instinctively, "A child needs a mother and a father, and I'm going to be both." But we gradually realise that perhaps his desire was there already. So the prelude gives you something emotionally strong, which helps the viewer accept the situation.

JR: Do you enjoy playing with actors' images?

FO: As soon as you're working with stars, there's an image that exists before the film, so you have to work with that. When I worked with Catherine Deneuve, it was hard to forget *Peau d'Ane* [*Donkey Skin*], *Belle de Jour* or *Tristana*. For me, when her films really work, it's because the director has thought about that – when people use her like a normal actress, it doesn't. So when I cast Romain Duris, it excites me because he has this image as a very French, very hip, heterosexual sex symbol – whereas as David, he's awkward, unhappy, ill at ease with himself.

JR: Why did you choose Anaïs Demoustier as Claire?

FO: I like her a lot. She's often in the shadows in supporting roles, as Lea Seydoux's best friend [in Zlotowski's *Belle Épine*] or whatever. For me, Claire is the main character – the whole film is seen through her eyes. So I needed someone who wouldn't crush Virginia, someone very generous, with a very expressive face, a face where there's always something going on, because she's often observing.

I tried out a lot of French actresses, but from the start I knew I'd use Anaïs. In France, people call her "the new Isabelle Huppert" because she has this very pure quality – but in my film, she's not so innocent, right? Claire is the more neurotic of the two characters; she's more twisted, because she takes time to really accept her own desire – and her desire is more complex than David's. He knows right away that he wants to be Virginia. With Claire, it's more of a slow process of attraction and repulsion.

JR: The film is a game of mirrors. It's about a woman who discovers her own desire as a woman...

FO: ...through a man who wants to be a woman...

JR: ...and a man who desires himself as a woman?

FO: I think that's always the case. I think everyone's experienced something like that – I certainly have, so it's quite natural for me to use it in my films.

JR: In terms of directing, all your films are a sort of disguise act – there isn't a single Ozon style, yet we recognise you in the pleasure you take in changing each time.

FO: You mean I'm a transvestite director? As far as I'm concerned, I'm 100 per cent myself; I'm not aware of disguising myself. It's always the story that dictates the style – the dress style! – of the film. I've always liked mixing genres. But of course certain references emerge, because I'm a cinephile. When I started writing *The New Girlfriend*, I realised it had a touch of *Vertigo*, and that confirmed what I was after. The end of *Vertigo* is very dramatic, but I wanted a fairytale happy ending. In *Vertigo*, Hitchcock kills off Madeleine, and James Stewart

is going to end up living with Barbara Bel Geddes – which is pretty depressing.

JR: Perhaps the key thing about your films is the tone: you often play on an ambivalence that's very hard to pin down. That must make it difficult for you to know whether a film will work for an audience or not.

FO: Well, that's very American. In America, they don't like shifts of tone – the tone has to be very precise. A film that plays with different tones is going to be unsettling – even for European viewers, although I think people come to my films with the idea of play. If people are open to that, they can have fun. It's a pact with the viewer – do you accept the director manipulating you, do you agree to take part or not? A film exists through the viewer's eyes – it comes from you, and the state you're in. I just put the elements in place, and after that the film's yours.

JR: Your characters are not easy to know – not for the viewers, and perhaps not even for you. Are you able to explain them to your actors in terms of traditional psychology or back story?

FO: I don't go in for psychological explanations. Sometimes I say to my actors – and I know you're not supposed to say this – "I don't know, let's find out together." With every film, I start out with some degree of mystery, never knowing exactly where it's heading. I want to see where the actors will take it. Things take shape in the shoot – that's why I often start editing while I'm shooting, because then I can come on set and change the script in terms of what I've seen.

JR: You've generally been thought of, since early films like *Sitcom* [1997], as a critic of bourgeois couples or families, and bourgeois identity in general – people's desire to be 'normal' before they really know themselves.

FO: Or to be perfect. I'm from a bourgeois background myself – what interests me is hypocrisy, lies, secrets. It's always fascinating to see the stories people tell about themselves, and what their truth is. But these days, there's a lot more tenderness. I used to be much harsher – *Sitcom* was very aggressive.

JR: It's been widely said that *The New Girlfriend* is the closest you've come to Almodóvar.

FO: I take that as a compliment. He's also depicted cross-dressing, and we share a taste for 40s/50s American cinema. I love *The Skin I Live In* – that's a very dark film.

JR: It would make a nice double-bill. They're both about wearing different 'skins'.

FO: Yes, we're asking the same kind of questions.

JR: You also share a trajectory in your careers, from 'punk' transgression to classicism.

FO: But I've always been interested in classicism. With the sort of stories I tell, classicism's the best option. I was never that interested in... I don't know if modernism's the right word. But my subject matter isn't necessarily classical. A director I can really relate to is Buñuel – his films became more and more classical. His great insight was the idea that you should film reality like a dream, and dreams like reality. That always struck a chord with me. 

 **The New Girlfriend is released in UK cinemas on 22 May and is reviewed on page 80**

I think people come to my films with the idea of play. It's a pact with the viewer – do you accept the director manipulating you, do you agree to take part or not?

LEFT HOLDING THE BABY François Ozon (above, left) enjoyed playing with the popular image of Romain Duris (below) in the film – an actor normally known as a very French, very hip, heterosexual sex symbol



AGE OF UNCERTAINTY

When Juliette Binoche asked Olivier Assayas to write a film for her, he presented her with 'Clouds of Sils Maria', a knowing, bitterly witty drama about a successful actress tackling the insecurities of ageing and the rivalry of young starlets looking to claim her throne

Introduction by Nick James, interview by Neil McGlone



In some ways, especially in the climate of contemporary cinema, Olivier Assayas's *Clouds of Sils Maria* could be seen as too sophisticated for its own good. Challenged by Juliette Binoche to come up with a film that would truly reflect

female experience, Assayas wrote a screenplay that presents us with the core dilemma of the successful actress: how do you cope with slowly transitioning from being an incendiary beauty with raw talent to becoming a magisterial doyenne of great acting, with all the lack of opportunity for good lead film roles that that status implies?

For the film's first half that dilemma is played out with multi-layered complexity between Maria Enders (Binoche), a middle-aged star of screen and stage, and her young assistant Valentine (Kristen Stewart), who runs Maria's life on such an intimate level that the question of whether something more than a professional relationship exists hovers unresolved. We join them as they are travelling to Switzerland to accept an award on behalf of Wilhelm Melchior, the theatre director whose production *Maloja Snake* gave Maria her first break. When Maria learns that Melchior has died, all kinds of doubts crowd in on her. But at the ceremony she meets another director who wants to cast her in the same play – this time as the seduced older woman rather than the young seductress.

Enriching this younger/older dichotomy are playoffs between generational tastes. Maria's potential co-star in the new production is troubled superhero-movie star Jo-Ann Ellis (played by Chloë Grace Moretz of *Kick-Ass* fame), who suffers from typical digital-age paparazzi and troll attention. But before Maria encounters Jo-Ann she has to exorcise her neurosis over a trio of relationships: with Melchior (a blend of Fassbinder and Bergman, whose films are key inspirations for Assayas here); with co-actor Henryk Wald (Hanns Zischler); and with Valentine, who is helping to prepare her by reading Jo-Ann's erotically charged lines in rehearsals. These take place in the Melchior's house in the Swiss Alpine retreat of Sils Maria, where the late director's widow has invited them to stay, and from here a meteorological phenomenon known as the Maloja Snake can be observed – a cloud that winds through the valleys in a long trail, and which provides a metaphor for the twists, turns and temptations of life.

As Assayas explains below, the richly impressionistic form of *Clouds of Sils Maria* was present right from its inception. Neil McGlone talked to him at the 2014 Mid-night Sun Film Festival in Sodankylä, Finland.

Neil McGlone: When *Clouds of Sils Maria* was announced, a number of actors were linked to it: Mia Wasikowska, Tom Sturridge, Bruno Ganz, Daniel Brühl. What happened?

Olivier Assayas: The one solid element was Juliette and

everything was structured around her. I wrote the script with no one particular in mind for Valentine, or for the other parts. When I started thinking about Valentine's character, Kristen came up really early. I had met her through our producer Charles Gillibert, who had also produced Walter Salles's *On the Road* [2012], so he knew her. I bumped into her a few times, as much as you can bump into Kristen. At that time I was not sure if she should be Valentine or Jo-Ann. I felt my way through the process but for some reason, initially, it didn't work out – so we moved on. At that point my choice for Valentine was Mia Wasikowska. We met, I liked her very much. Then she came back and said she was contracted for the sequel to *Alice in Wonderland* [2010] and that the minute it got into production she would not be allowed to do anything else. Then Kristen, or her agent, learned of the situation and came back to us saying she was available and really wanted to do it. So did she want to play Jo-Ann or Valentine? The answer came loud and clear that she wanted to do Valentine. I said, "Are you sure, because that's not the way I see you?" The film is so connected to the dynamic between those two actresses that it could have been another movie. I mean, if it had been Mia Wasikowska, it would have been a completely different film. Kristen knew she could have fun with the role and add a [real] layer of mirror-game to a movie that is already pretty much a mirror-game. In retrospect she was just more aware than I was of where we were heading with it.

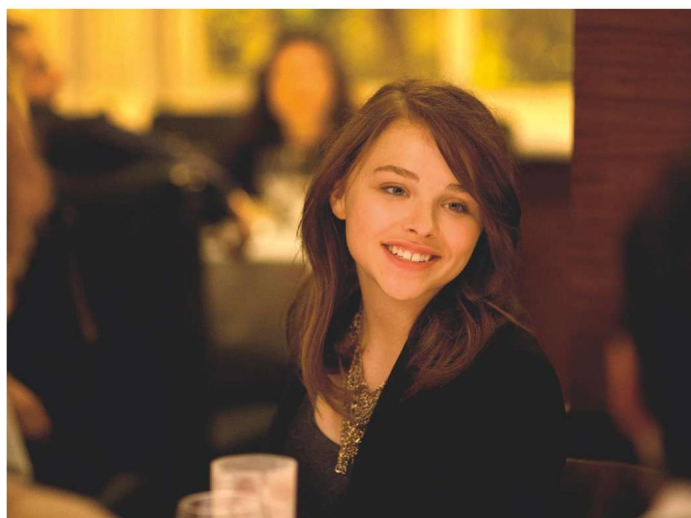
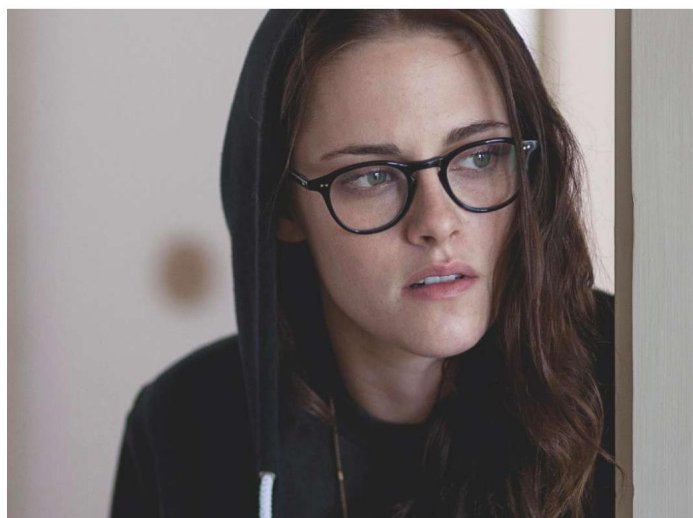
With the other parts, Bruno Ganz was one of the names discussed but I never had a solid discussion with him. At the time Daniel [Brühl] had two hot movies out, *Rush* [2013] and *The Fifth Estate* [2013], and both were in contention for the awards season. So all of a sudden he had this heavy PR schedule and that was exactly when we would have been shooting so there was no way to work around it. Tom Sturridge was up for a small part, but then all of a sudden Thomas Vinterberg gave him one of the leads in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. He came to us and said he loved the project and wanted to do it but this was a much bigger role and naturally went with it.

NM: The character of the director Wilhelm Melchior was interpreted by some as an homage to either Ingmar Bergman or Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and the film itself shares comparisons to both *Persona* [1966] and *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* [1972].

OA: Both movies were inspirations. It's the very basic logic that you start from when you're constructing the screenplay, because this movie did not first come up as a story. It came up as an actress. It was more like Juliette who called me and said, "Why don't we make a movie? Why don't we finally make a film together where I would have the leading part?" So I'm making a movie around Juliette, that's *about* Juliette not *with* Juliette. She's getting older, her career is fluctuating. What can

YOUNG PRETENDERS
In *Clouds of Sils Maria* Juliette Binoche (above) plays actress Maria Enders, Kristen Stewart (right) is her assistant Valentine, and Chloë Grace Moretz (far right) is a young movie star cast opposite Maria in the revival of a play







What I was recording on screen, almost in a documentary way, was what was happening between Juliette Binoche and Kristen Stewart

◀ I build around her? Obviously there's some kind of very automatic logic to say, "Why not make a movie about an actress who's working on her next project with her assistant." So we are into *Persona*-land; *Persona* is one of my favourite movies of all time. So what's the play? Well that involves two women, an ambiguous relationship – so Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*. It happened in the process, almost within 15 minutes of hanging up the phone on Juliette. Then I wasn't sure of any of the other elements.

What's interesting is that the process of writing this film was very long. I mean this sounds extremely easy, but I had no idea where I was going. I wrote it in layers; I started taking notes and then put it aside and came back to it six months later. I was not sure, I did not have a last act. It was not so much that it took long to write it but to make sense of it because I had scattered elements. Ultimately what is interesting is that there was something there. Sometimes you have scattered elements but somehow they make no sense together. Here, they were scattered – I had the landscapes, I had the black-and-white film [Arnold Fanck's 1924 film *Das Wolkenphänomen von Maloja*], I had Juliette, I had the internet, I had *Persona*, *Petra von Kant* – and somehow this all belonged together. I had just not found all the keys to link them and so it was a process of really understanding how this stuff mixed.

NM: Your first screenplay was for André Téchiné's *Rendez-vous* [1985], which starred a relatively unknown Juliette Binoche. You could say that you and Juliette had history?

OA: Absolutely. To me that was the key to the whole thing. We can mention *Persona* but ultimately it all brings us back to *Rendez-vous*. It made sense for me to make a movie with Juliette at this stage in her career, and mine, because we have a past in common. We can build on that. There was something that was unique in our relationship in the sense that we went way back but ultimately we had never really done anything with that. There was still something to be explored in terms of our own relationship to time and that's really what triggered everything.

NM: You were working with three of the biggest actresses around today. Can you speak about the process of working with them?

OA: I don't rehearse at all and I don't do table readings.

I don't discuss the characters with the actors and I don't even rehearse on set. It was a six-week shoot, really tight. Most of the big scenes, specifically in the chalet with those big dialogue scenes – they were usually shot in a day. So it was challenging.

When we got to the final ten days, we ended up shooting the mountain and chalet scenes, I realised that was the core of the film and I was just looking at the pages and said, "Oh my God, what have I got myself into?" I was doing five-minute takes. We were moving all over the place and then, luckily, it was the end of the shoot and everybody was completely into the movie, into the characters. It was just happening, but it was pretty intense. Movies are not so much about elements; it's about the alchemy between those elements. So what I was recording, almost in a documentary way, was what was happening between Juliette and Kristen.

NM: The landscape in the movie seems like an additional character and yet it's timeless, compared with the characters' changing personas.

OA: This is a very specific landscape, its not that timeless. I could have put it in some kind of postcard landscape, like some kind of generic beautiful landscape, but this happens to be one very specific landscape that has been inhabited by poets, painters, philosophers – Nietzsche and the alpine movies of Arnold Fanck and Leni Riefenstahl. It's not neutral. The landscape is also inhabited by strange and ambiguous forces; it's not just a nice pleasant landscape. It has this mysterious meteorological phenomenon, which can be good or evil depending on how you look at it. So the landscape is pretty much character and also part of the layered history of the film.

NM: You've always preferred to shoot on film stock rather than digital and I understand that the French fashion house Chanel helped you achieve that?

OA: Chanel has been really generous. The money came almost personally from Karl Lagerfeld. We got in touch with them because we had a scene where we had the name Chanel come up in the screenplay – which I wrote as a joke really. So they said, "Oh but you know Karl loves your movies and we would be more than happy to help." So they ended up giving us money. It was the difference between shooting on digital or film stock.

NM: We live in a world where social media and celebrity worship dominate the media, and can often be detrimental to a person's career. We saw what happened in Cannes when critics came out of a screening of *Grace of Monaco* and vented their spleens via Twitter. As a former critic, what is your opinion on this now you're on the other side?

OA: I observe it from a safe distance. I'd say, in a certain way, it's none of my concern. I'm not saying that in the sense that I am not interested in the internet or celebrity culture, but only as a viewer. It's part of my life, it's part of my culture and I use it in the stories that I tell, but I don't Google myself or my movies. I don't read tweets because to me it's all parasitical to filmmaking. It's not that I'm against it, but I just don't want to have it in mind. It's happening in another world. I don't want to be the guy they write about on the internet – that's a fiction. There's an Olivier Assayas somewhere on the net and I don't want to know him. I'm making my movies and that's it. ☺

i *Clouds of Sils Maria* is released in UK cinemas on 15 May and is reviewed on page 68

OLIVIER, OLIVIER
Olivier Assayas (above) was inspired by Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* when he was writing *Clouds of Sils Maria*, which also has hints of Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *All About Eve*

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THE PAST IS NOT MYSELF

A concentration camp survivor, her face altered by surgery, returns to the ruins of postwar Berlin to track down her husband, in Christian Petzold's 'Phoenix', a complex melodrama with a clear debt to Hitchcock's 'Vertigo'

By Neil Young

A minutely measured psychological romantic melodrama set amid the bombed-out ruins of post-war Berlin, *Phoenix* is the third film by German writer-director Christian Petzold to obtain UK distribution – after *Yella* (2007) and *Barbara* (2012). All three films star Petzold's regular leading lady Nina Hoss, who, in this latest collaboration, plays concentration-camp survivor Nelly. Returning home to the devastated German capital, Nelly is both mentally and physically a different person from the woman she had been before, her face surgically reconstructed following traumatic injury. Her appearance is altered to such a degree that her own husband, Johnny (Ronald Zehrfeld), fails to recognise her.

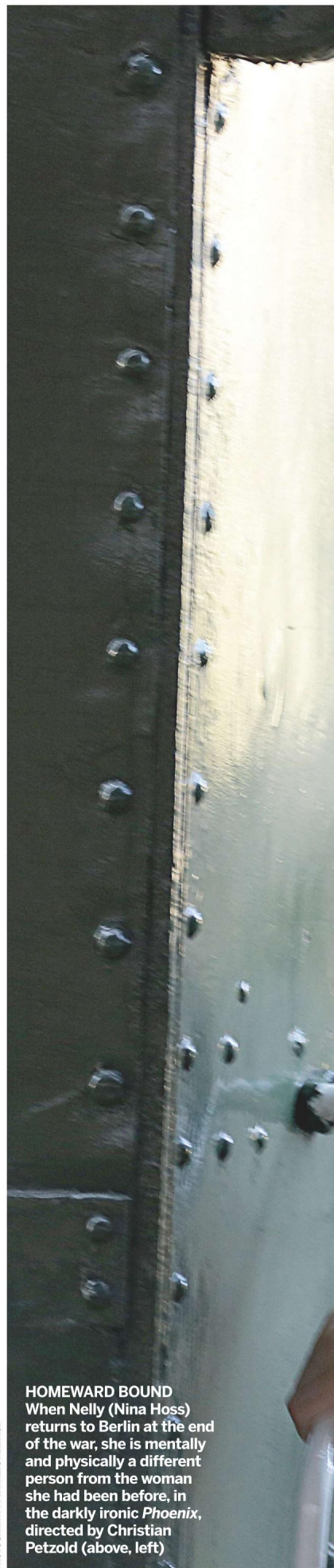
This sets in motion an intricate, darkly ironic story dealing with issues of guilt, redemption, deception and identity – a complex work clearly indebted to, but never overshadowed by, Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Both screenplays are loosely based on French novels: *Phoenix* is inspired by Hubert Monteilhet's *Return from the Ashes* (*Le Retour des cendres*, 1961), previously filmed in the UK by J. Lee Thompson in 1965, starring Maximilian Schell, Ingrid Thulin and Samantha Eggar.

With *Phoenix*, the 54-year-old Petzold confirms his status among the front rank of European filmmakers. His 2000 drama *The State I Am In* (*Die Innere Sicherheit*) is cited as a key landmark in the unofficial movement known as the Berlin School, comprising



HOMEWARD BOUND
When Nelly (Nina Hoss) returns to Berlin at the end of the war, she is mentally and physically a different person from the woman she had been before, in the darkly ironic *Phoenix*, directed by Christian Petzold (above, left)

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FABRIZIO MATESE





 low-key, socially acute dramas by directors such as Thomas Arslan and Angela Schanelec.

Petzold's eminence at home can be gauged by his five prizes for Best Fiction Feature at the German Film Critics Association Awards; since they became an annual event in 1968, no one else has won more than three of these accolades. Born and raised in an industrial part of West Germany, Petzold moved to Berlin in 1981 and studied under Hartmut Bitomsky and Harun Farocki – the latter becoming his regular dramaturgical collaborator on many of his projects before his death aged 70 last summer.

Neil Young: I'd like to start at the beginning, with the scene in which the main character, Nelly, has bandages on her face and she's being driven at night by her best friend, Lene [Nina Kunzendorf]. It harks back to the first scene of your first film *Drifters* [*Pilotinnen*, 1995], made for television, which also starts with a woman driving a car.

Christian Petzold: Yes, you're right. Same cameraman, too [Hans Fromm]. It's a coincidence, but perhaps under the surface it's a kind of... self-homage! We originally started with another scene. We always shoot chronologically, so on the first day we shot a scene based on a photograph taken during the time of the Holocaust, from the Shoah Foundation. It's a picture of a forest, in a fantastic morning light, and it looks like an impressionist painting by Manet. But when you look closely you see there are dead bodies all over the forest – it's after the liberation of Auschwitz, there was a death march, and they killed the people in the forest during the march. The original opening was a surreal scene, where you see the bodies and people being shot and then the *Wehrmacht* leave the frame. You hear piano music coming from somewhere and one of the 'dead' bodies comes to life, and it's Nelly, and she walks through the forest as the titles start.

NY: Why did you decide not to use this for the opening?

CP: It felt like 'literature' – and when I shot it, I felt embarrassed, ashamed, because I had done the same thing that all the other Holocaust movies do. They think they can make pictures of the Holocaust, and that's not possible. I don't like *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* [2008], films like that. So I cut it out – I used part of it later for a brief dream sequence – and started with the second scene, with Nina Kunzendorf. And, of course, the main actress isn't in the first frames; also we don't see her face until much later. I decided not to show it, because at this stage she doesn't exist. She has no face, has no identity, she has no body left, so I couldn't start the movie with her.

NY: Women are the agents of change in the film. It's Lene driving the car; the film traces Nelly's journeys, her movements. Men are to some degree 'passengers'. Her husband Johnny has one idea and follows it. Lene and Nelly are capable of looking around, but he has restricted vision. He can't even recognise his own wife. Do you feel any sympathy at all for the poor guy, or is he beyond that?

CP: During the rehearsals we watched Edgar Ulmer's *Detour* [1945], and it's about a man who's always talking about how he's innocent, when in fact everything that has happened has happened to him. I said to Ronald Zehrfeld, "This is your character – he's always thinking about himself only, like he's in a tunnel." In German it's '*Scheuklappen*' ['blinkers'], a fantastic word. And so, he's going through this whole story but he doesn't see that this woman is in love with him. He thinks it's a dialogue, but it's really just a monologue with himself.



When I shot the original opening, I felt ashamed, because I had done what all the other Holocaust movies do. They think they can make pictures of the Holocaust, and that's not possible

NY: You also referenced *Detour* significantly in your second TV movie, *Cuba Libre* [1996].

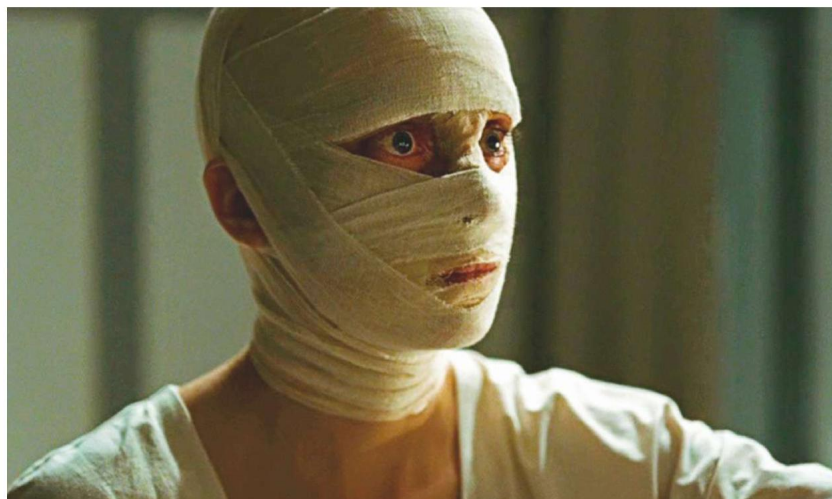
CP: Yes, it's something I'm very interested in, these *films noir*. There is a fantastic essay by one of the best German film theory writers, Frieda Grafe – 'Light from Berlin'. It's about all the people who had to leave Germany or Austria in the 1930s because they were Jews or communists or homosexuals, and they went to Hollywood and they created their 'light'. It's the light of the Siodmak movies, Billy Wilder, and it's a German light. They called this genre the *film noir*, and all the people are living in the night. Nina said to me that Nelly is living only in the night, like a vampire: "I go out in the night to find my husband, I went out in the night in my dreams, I'm out of the land of the dead, but the land of the dead is around me – it's a land of shadows." And this is the country of the *film noir*, and so we wanted to take the 'light' back from Hollywood into our movie.

Because you know, all these German and Austrian refugees and migrants, like Fritz Lang, Wilder, Siodmak, they came back after '45 and they had this dream of resuming their old lives – they're a little bit like Nelly. They thought they could somehow recapture 1933, where they could work on with their movies; they wanted to give Germany the movies back. And all these movies were economic disasters. Nobody wanted to see the movies, and they all went back to Hollywood. Otto Preminger later went to England for *Bunny Lake Is Missing* [1965]... And this was interesting for us, during preparation and rehearsal, to find pictures from this time and not just 'themes' or literature.

NY: Another British film from 1965 was *Return from the Ashes*, based on the same novel you adapted for *Phoenix*.

CP: Yeah, I haven't seen it; I know it's very different. I read this novel in the 80s when I was 20 or so, in German. The cover of the novel was Janet Leigh's eye at the end of the shower scene in *Psycho*; they didn't use *Vertigo*, which would have been more appropriate, I think because the film wasn't widely available at that point.

In the novel, the woman's face is not destroyed. But the camp destroyed her identity, so she went to Switzerland to rebuild herself, make herself healthy. She says, "OK, I have a second chance in life, I want to be very, very pretty." So she changed herself to a 'pretty' woman, and the only thing she wants to have is a 'Jewish' nose. And then she goes to Paris. It's different from the German



situation because Paris still exists when she returns – the bourgeoisie exists, the boulevards they exist – and so the ordinary life she left, which she was cut out from, it exists. So there is a possibility to come back, to resume.

The thing that I'm interested in is *Pygmalion*: a man is creating a woman – and you know from Sigmund Freud, in traumatic situations you recognise, repeat and erase. So when you have a trauma, during analysis you have to recognise the trauma, you have to do it again to feel it, and then you can erase it. And this is the work of Johnny. He wants to recognise her, to repeat, for rehearsal, then he wants to receive money and cut his love feelings out of his body. And she plays the game with him because she wants also to be recognised, to repeat their love – but she wants not to erase but to live on.

NY: Your collaboration with Nina Hoss down the years has been much discussed, but at least as important was your work on many films with your film-school teacher Harun Farocki, who recently passed away. Did he see the film?

CP: No. There was a plan for us to watch it in the middle of August. Just before that, Harun was on holiday with his grandchild in one of the places where we shot the film, about an hour from Berlin. He went into the water of the swimming pool there and came out, had a heart attack and died, so he never saw the film. But we talked about this film for, I think, 15 years. His mother always used to say to him, "Harun, Christian makes real movies, but you make documentaries." Like, I'm writing novels and he's writing essays. We always joked about that.

NY: He came across *Phoenix*'s source novel first, I believe.

CP: In 1985 he made a 'real' movie, called *Betrayed* [*Betrogen*], about a man who kills his wife, and the wife's sister impersonates her, and so on. During his research for the film he found the book by Monteilhet. He said, "*Betrayed* was not really good, you have to do it again, I'll give you the script." So we talked about the Monteilhet story because we wanted to do it together, but we couldn't find a way. Harun and me always wanted to do *Phoenix*, but we were somehow afraid. And it was a difficult shoot, a balancing act. During the shooting of *Barbara* [2012], in the evenings we were free, we knew everything was all right, we were crossing the river and we knew we would reach the other side. But in this movie I was always in the middle of the river and I wasn't sure how to reach the other side.

When we were thinking about doing *Phoenix*, we were surrounded by all these Holocaust movies – I saw one of them and I had to stop after the first two or three minutes. I couldn't stand the costumes, the actors. No film took the side of the survivors, the people who came back – you can find these stories in Hollywood, in the capitalistic system. Like when they had Vietnam, they created a new Hollywood. New Hollywood means for me asking, "What is America? What is the country you're living in? Who are these people who are our governors?" In Germany, they never had these 'coming home' movies, from the point of view of the survivors. Nothing about the soldiers' perspectives when they came home – maybe just two or three. The Germans after the war kept talking about 'zero', our 'Year Zero' – they are the 'phoenix', I think. They said, "Everything is destroyed, now we are stronger than before." This is the phoenix myth, I think. This is why the film has the title 'Phoenix' – it's not Nelly. Nelly is no phoenix...



FACE TO FACE
After the war, Nelly has major facial reconstruction surgery (below left), and when she tracks down her husband Johnny, played by Ronald Zehrfeld (above, with Nelly outside the Phoenix nightclub), he is unable to recognise her

NY: It is the name of her place of work, the nightclub. With Farocki, there was always this interest in economic imperatives, and how people are formed and/or deformed by their employment, the structure and language of work. Does this apply to *Phoenix*?

CP: For 30 years, Harun was always researching the moment where production and work changed to work for wages, work for money, and what happens over time. The Nazis needed six years to build anti-Semitism into a force in Germany because in 1938, during Kristallnacht, many Germans said, "No, we don't want to do that." So they knew they needed two or three more years of propaganda and indoctrination to form this new society – and this is the same thing which has happened with capitalism... So, Johnny is the 'new' German, who wants to change guilt into money. And so all the things which happen in this Frankenstein's basement, this laboratory, are not only about love and desire and guiltiness, but how to change love and the body and laughing into money. And so this starts in 1945 when the new capitalism was coming to the ruins of Berlin.

NY: We see it emerging in 1945-46: the embrace of capitalism and American culture. There are several scenes in the Phoenix club. There's one moment where 'Night and Day' is being sung in German, and when they switch to English there's a huge round of applause. American culture is being embraced to fill a vacuum; German culture is in limbo. There are no German songs, no German cinema. Capitalism, too, was seen as an 'American' thing which could be embraced...

CP: I think so. There were many American cabaret clubs at this time. My idea is that the club in the film is the same place where a Weimar-era cabaret club existed, like in the Liza Minnelli film [*Cabaret*, 1972], and now they start to sing again, but they don't know that they have lost something. They're singing Cole Porter and Kurt Weill songs, and the American soldiers with their cigarettes and fantastic bodies, they are around. But something is wrong with the Germans in this moment. They have no cinema. They can't dance, really. And even today they don't have really good music, the only thing they have is classical music... Only after '68 did they start to recreate something. But, as we see in the scenes in the Phoenix club, they have this idea that they can somehow jump over the abyss of the Holocaust. And, of course, it's an illusion. 

 **Phoenix** is released in UK cinemas on 8 May and is reviewed on page 82

CODE OF SILENCE

Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy's extraordinary *The Tribe* is a brutal, unsentimental drama about the criminal antics of a group of pupils at a deaf school in Ukraine – and a film that turns the tables on the hearing public by taking place entirely in sign language, without subtitles

By Jonathan Romney

I can say without hyperbole that the Ukrainian feature *The Tribe* is a film that genuinely makes us think again about the way we see and hear movies. Ah, you say, but we've already run up against a lazy assumption here – that we are all able to experience both sight and sound in the cinema. Isn't film, after all, an art that discriminates against both blind people and deaf people? Don't talking pictures assume that their viewers (stop, that's too sight-specific a term, I mean their audience; ah, but that's implicitly sound-centric) have the faculties to get the full benefit of a film's visual and sonic signifiers?

That's where Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy's remarkable debut feature turns the tables on a hearing public. *The Tribe* is a film made expressly for two audiences at once – one deaf, one hearing. But it puts the latter audience at an unusual disadvantage, for its hearing viewers are placed in the position of not getting a fundamental dimension of the film's system of communication; deaf viewers, however, particularly those who understand Russian Sign Language, will be one up on them.

At the start, *The Tribe* issues its challenge, in a title card announcing that it will contain no spoken dialogue, only sign language – and no subtitles. So how are hearing viewers meant to follow the film's signing? In a way, that's not really a problem, because writer-director Slaboshpytskiy has set out to make a silent film (taking the term as a genre description rather than a literal one), and silent cinema is something we've become newly attuned to following the success of *The Artist* (see Slaboshpytskiy interview, page 26). Besides, the first two of the film's 34 extended sequence shots induct us into the drama in a way that feels fairly comfortable. A teenage boy gets off a bus and asks a passer-by for directions (we see their gestures, but hear only the overwhelming racket of city traffic). Then, in an extraordinary Steadicam shot of around six and a half minutes (roughly the favoured shot length throughout), the camera follows the youth to the yard of a school, where a cleaner signals at him through a window, directing him to an entrance further on. As the boy exits the screen, we look across the school hall to another yard, where a special assembly is taking place: it involves bouquets of flowers, children of all ages, a smiling head teacher, and everyone using sign language (including hands waved above heads to signify applause). By the time the boy walks back into shot, having missed the ceremony, we feel fairly at ease both with the film and its setting, a school for deaf children and teenagers; Slaboshpytskiy has us settled in nicely.

But as the boy is introduced to school life, things soon get darker. The smiling teachers disappear, and we, like the boy, are thrown into a closed, lawless world. This establishment is a place of considerable cruelty, where our hero undergoes a brutal hazing before being recruited to a criminal gang of older pupils; they rule the place, in collusion with a corrupt woodwork teacher and a smiling outsider (a school governor? an



In reality, the film is full of dialogue – only it's in sign language, none of it translated for a hearing audience. The characters speak throughout, not just with hands but with their entire bodies

outside bureaucrat?) who keeps dropping by. The gang specialises in muggings, thefts on trains and prostitution. At night, two older girls turn tricks in a lorry park; when their designated pimp is accidentally killed, our hero is assigned to replace him. He forms a bond with one of the girls – sexual and possibly emotional, although without dialogue, it's hard to gauge their relationship exactly.

Without dialogue? In reality, the film is full of dialogue – only it's in sign language, none of it translated for a hearing audience. The characters speak throughout, not just with hands but with their entire bodies. If you're a stranger to Russian Sign Language, you probably won't latch on to any of the specifics of what's said, but you will become acutely aware of general ways in which the characters, played by deaf non-professionals, communicate – with us and with each other.

For example, you become very conscious of the intensity of the gestures – the way certain hand signals are powerfully inflected, the way a certain staccato jerk of an arm might signify the equivalent of a shout. There's something profoundly disorienting about seeing fight scenes, beatings and arguments that take place without a single voice being heard, but with the emotional tenor always intensely evident. Gestures also form a sort of noise in scenes where several characters are signing at once – a visual equivalent of overlapping dialogue.

SIGNS AND MEANINGS

But as hearing viewers, we also become intensely aware of what we're not getting: we may fathom the overall drift of some conversations, but without detail, we won't know precisely why such and such an argument erupts. But what's essential is precisely this shock of exclusion: of realising that *The Tribe* does not hand meaning on a plate to us hearing viewers. Meanwhile, those who are able to read the sign language will have an entire script of dialogue available to them.

There are other resonances (excuse the sonic metaphor) to our exclusion. The absence of words makes it that bit harder to follow the narrative, or the connection between the individual, almost always self-contained, sequence shots: the lack of verbal signifiers like "tomorrow" or "last week" leaves us more adrift.

Nor do we know characters' names, although they're identified in the credits – the protagonist is Sergey (Grygoriy Fesenko), the girl he clicks with is Anya (Yana Novikova). Instead, we read characters by their appearance and demeanour: there's a macho blond boy whose cocksure mannerisms mark him out the first time we see him in a classroom scene, and a gang henchman who stands out with his pursed-lip scowl and hurried, faintly camp gait. Beyond their actual signing, it's these young people's physical rhythms that tell us who they are and what they have to say.

While *The Tribe* could be considered a silent film, it is far from being a film without sound, as witness Sergiy



Stepanskyi's richly textured sound design. Some spoken language is heard, but it's presented as background babble, in the scene set in a visa queue at the Italian embassy. There's the noise of traffic, the desolate crunch of snow underfoot, of footsteps and slamming doors in the dormitory corridors. But Slaboshpytskiy also makes arresting dramatic use of the gap between what hearing viewers register, and what the deaf characters do not. The pimp at the lorry park is killed because he doesn't hear what we do – the warning beep of the truck that is about to reverse over him. This disjunction is played up to maximum effect in the film's genuinely shocking climax – and what you can certainly expect to hear at that point are gasps of shock, from deaf and hearing viewers alike.

This latter moment is one of the film's two most audacious extended takes (while Valentyn Vasyanovych, also *The Tribe's* editor, pulls off a *tour de force* as director of photography, plaudits should also go to Steadicam ops Vitaly Kovgan and Sergiy Blinov). The other will certainly prove the film's most controversial episode – an abortion scene played out with unsettling observational detachment over seven minutes, making the impression of real time intensely uncomfortable. It's also one of the few moments at which we hear a character's voice: the scene ends with the strangled moan of Anya's distress, its timbre and intensity making the scene feel far more real, more intrusive and more disturbing than the conventionally orchestrated shrieks we're used to hearing when actors are called on to signal agony.

Slaboshpytskiy is not deaf himself, but has been exploring the contrasts of sound and silence for some time. His 23-minute *Nuclear Waste* (2012) is also wordless. Set in a nuclear plant, it uses largely static tableaux to depict workers dehumanised by landscape, machinery and architecture alike; we could almost be watching a formal documentary, until a six-minute shot in which two middle-aged workers undress for a bout of very functional sex. The director previously worked with deaf teenagers in his 2010 short *Deafness*, a nine-minute single shot in which a young deaf man encounters a brutal

cop. In that film, the title could be read as a metaphor, pointing to authority as being truly deaf; in *The Tribe*, however, any metaphorical dimensions of deafness are secondary to the (altogether more telling) way in which they simply become the film's dominant given.

It's tempting to interpret *The Tribe* as an allegory of the political situation in Ukraine, or indeed in any part of the former Soviet Union, as depicting an order in which citizens have been callously abandoned by the authority that purports to protect them, leading to conflicted attempts at self-determination (the school's sixth form as a nationalistic breakaway republic of deaf people?). However you read it, *The Tribe* is an audacious work – hardcore in its formal invention and in its readiness to follow its subject matter to extremes of poetry and violence. Slaboshpytskiy's film is also lucidly anti-sentimental in its refusal of the patronising connotations often attached to disability in cinema, especially when associated with youth. Its characters are not plucky, winsome teens nobly struggling to overcome their disability and make good; they're as vicious, venal and merciless as anyone else. As for how *The Tribe* has been received by deaf viewers, I can only count on anecdotal evidence: the enthusiastic response of one deaf viewer at last year's BFI London Film Festival, who simply told Slaboshpytskiy during the post-screening Q&A, "I've been waiting for this film a very long time." 

FIGHTING BACK
'The Tribe' (above, below) refuses to patronise its youthful characters in the manner of many films that touch on issues of disability in cinema, allowing them to be as vicious, venal and merciless as anyone else



VITAL SIGNS

'The Tribe' director Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy on working with speech-impaired non-professionals, the line between screen sex and porn, and why a revolution is like a first love

By Isabel Stevens

Isabel Stevens: You've talked about your film as a homage to silent film. Was that your starting point?

Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy: Yes. The idea came into my head about 20 years ago and from the very beginning I knew that I didn't want to make a homage via a stylised method. But I needed to find a method that would justify the absence of the dialogue and I felt straight away that it must be in sign language. The film only went into production at the end of 2010 when I received a grant from the Hubert Bals Fund for script development and by then I'd already made a short movie, also wordless, called *Deafness*.

IS: Were your young actors aware of silent cinema? Did you show them any silent films?

MS: I picked up young people literally from the street. They hadn't heard of silent cinema. We made a fatal mistake. We showed them *The Artist* [2011] by Michel Hazanavicius. I hadn't seen it myself then. It's very beautiful – but everything is stylised, including the music and the acting. It was horrible because we had a young actor, full of energy, who started mimicking them. We did show other movies – *9 Songs* [2004] by Michael Winterbottom, films by the Dardenne brothers and some recent Romanian movies – so they could see different styles and types of films and acting. But we tried to stay away from silent films because such hyper-emotional expression is natural for deaf people, so it could have been a disaster if we tried to amplify it and inject too much from silent movies.

There were three sex scenes and I was worried it would put off some of them. I told them there would be sex scenes but I didn't tell them the details. This is why we showed them the Winterbottom movie – so they can learn that sex on screen is not always porn and to let them learn about the difference. They were not aware of different types of film, only mainstream movies and porn.

We organised working in a certain way, quite differently from normal. The young people were more or less free or flexible. One girl had just left her job at McDonald's. Another had just quit college. So we were able to put them on a monthly payroll and it became their main job. We rehearsed for many weeks. And when we felt that we were



Crimes and misdemeanours: Yana Novikova, who plays Anya in *The Tribe*, with Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy

ready, only then would we order in all the heavy equipment, lights etc and film a scene.

IS: Did the script change at all once you started working with them?

MS: We changed hardly anything in the script. The only thing was that we had one storyline that we realised was slowing down the action. It was a little story alongside the others in the film about pickpocketing and how deaf people are the best pickpockets in the world because they have the most developed skills with their hands. We were trying to interlace it into the movie as well but it was a bit of an issue. I'm not sad that we got rid of it.

IS: How do you feel about people interpreting the film alongside the 2014 Ukrainian revolution and the protests at Maidan?

MS: I am actually very proud. I like revolutions. A revolution is like a first love. It is beautiful but then everything ends up badly. But Maidan took place in 2014. I finished the script in 2011. When we were arranging the preparations for the filming, it was in parallel with Maidan. If you look at the movie text book I used for studying, it says that the German expressionists like Murnau or Fritz Lang felt the coming of fascism, and that is why there is such a grim atmosphere in their films. I lived in Kiev before Maidan. It's quite possible I caught something in the air that led to the film coming out the way it did. Ukraine as a state is set up very similarly to the deaf mafia in the film. The deaf mafia resembles the government and how they operate. The only

I lived in Kiev before the Maidan protests. It's possible I caught something in the air that led to the film's atmosphere

way out of this was to smash their silly heads and this is why this happened. When I am six feet under, there will be books saying that I predicted the coming of Maidan.

IS: The choreography of actors and their movements felt sometimes like watching a dance – particularly in the scenes where the camera moves a lot, like the one where it follows a lot of the teenagers running to a fight.

MS: They were acting really as they do in day-to-day life. But sometimes we managed to reinforce certain movements with the camera. When we were making this movie, there were so many constraints: the absence of full speech; very long takes, with no change in point of view. We had to use a lot of wide-angle shots because of the range of movements we had to capture. It was impossible to film in close-up. And cinema is widescreen, so I say let us enjoy it. So often films are made mid-wide so they can sell it to TV.

But in the film the camera is often moving. We were hoping to create the sensation that the viewer is actually present at the place. With the camera move down the hill, and then to the fight, I wanted to make it feel like you were in the crowd with them. But I don't actually like the fight scene there. They were rehearsing it for two weeks and I still think it's too soft; it should have been a bit more brutal.

IS: It's unusual that your DP was also your editor.

MS: Yes. We had all the shots we'd filmed in half a year and then we edited it in 30 minutes. We linked them in a certain order and we had a movie. Then we sent it to Cannes and it was only after it got accepted, that we really analysed it and checked every cut. Every take is very long – sometimes like five or six minutes, so we did refine it a bit. 

i **The Tribe** is released in UK cinemas on 15 May and is reviewed on page 91

"SUMPTUOUS, SURREAL, SERENADING, AND AUDACIOUSLY SUPERB"

Nikola Grozdanovic, The Playlist



The Guardian

"AN INTOXICATING STUDY OF PASSION"

Ben Nicholson, CineVue



CineVue



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ABDERRAHMANE SISSAKO

The Mauritanian director's latest film, *Timbuktu*, blends politics and poetry in a lyrical examination of the brutal repercussions of the jihadist takeover in the north of Mali. Here he discusses the condescending attitude of Western media to events in Africa, the pleasures of slow cinema, the importance of emotional honesty and why, on screen, a whisper can often convey more than a scream. **Interview by Geoff Andrew**

To call Abderrahmane Sissako Africa's greatest living filmmaker would be a mistake, not only because it risks minimising the substantial achievements of other important directors, but also because it would do Sissako himself a disservice. He is, after all, one of the most distinctive and impressive filmmakers at work today, regardless of continental provenance. In terms of quantity, due in no small part to the challenges faced by filmmakers working in much of Africa, Sissako's filmography is quite modest – four features, a documentary, several shorts and a TV drama. In terms of its ambitions and achievements, however, it is anything but.

Sissako's abiding concerns – exile and identity, culture clash and confusion, injustice and inequality – and his gently innovative, impressionistic approach to narrative style were already to be found in early films such as *October* (1992), *Life on Earth* (1998) and the documentary *Rostov-Luanda* (1997). But it was with *Waiting for Happiness* (2002), which played in the Un Certain Regard strand in Cannes and won him the Fipresci critics' prize, that Sissako really began to attract attention. With its limpid visual beauty, its wholly persuasive performances by a non-professional cast, and an elliptical but engaging narrative focused on a motley array of characters living in or passing through the Mauritanian coastal town of Nouadhibou, the film demonstrated – with a seductive, lyrical ease that's almost unique to Sissako's work – that it was perfectly possible to make a topical, deeply affecting film about migration, alienation and imperilled tradition without lapsing into simplistic cliché, maudlin rhetoric or tub-thumping hyperbole. *Bamako* (2006), while more evidently fuelled by anger, was likewise refreshing in its narrative strategy: the 'story' follows an improbable but profoundly relevant trial at which the IMF and World Bank are charged with imposing catastrophic policies upon the African continent, while the tribulations of everyday existence continue to afflict those whose homes adjoin the courtyard where the hearing is taking place.

Sissako, then, is notable for conflating politics and filmic poetry in highly imaginative and original ways; lyricism, metaphor, music, even comedy and flights of fantasy may be juxtaposed within the fragmented but always lucid narrative, while 'fiction' encircles and feeds off 'reality'. His latest work, the Oscar-nominated *Timbuktu*, about

the horrendous effects of a jihadist invasion and takeover of northern Mali, is a supremely subtle example of his work: direct, deceptively simple and utterly unsentimental in its heartrending look at a range of ordinary lives wrecked by murderous fundamentalist intolerance. What little physical violence is shown is quick, brutal, never gratuitous; Sissako knows all too well that there are many other ways of being destroyed. As ever, however, he allows for tantalising glimmers of hope, confident that there are others who share his humanity and compassion.

The following interview took place at a Screen Talk during the 2014 BFI London Film Festival.

Geoff Andrew: When did you decide to become a filmmaker and why?

Abderrahmane Sissako: I'm frequently asked this question, but often feel I give the wrong answer. Many of our reasons for doing things are buried deep within us. At first I wanted to make films simply because I wanted to tell the stories of the world around me; at least, that's what I used to say when I was starting out. But I no longer feel that's the real reason. It's not that I'm a cinephile, either; I don't go to see that many films. There's a deeper reason, which is quite different.

My mother's first son was taken away from her when her husband – who was Algerian – left her, taking the four-year-old boy with him. She only saw him again when he was 25 years old, and that was completely by chance, in Dakar. But every day she'd speak about him – his name was Sherif – in front of her other children; I was the youngest. One day she came home and said, "I found Sherif, he's studying film." And for years thereafter I'd hear her speaking so proudly

about that. So I'm not altogether sure whether I went into film in order to stop her going on about Sherif, or whether I did it to please her. But I do know that this brother whom I never saw fascinated me, and that I too went to study film. So I suspect the real reason for what I do now had something to do with making my mother happy.

GA: You moved around a lot when you were young. You were born in Mauritania, then went to Mali, then back to Mauritania before going to study for 11 years in Russia. You also lived for some years in Paris, and now you're back in Mauritania. Did all this travelling around affect you as a filmmaker, and did it give you a certain perspective on life?

AS: Travel – and exile, even when it's enforced – can be an opportunity. It allows one to encounter other peoples, other cultures, other ideas, other identities – and one is enriched by that. And, of course, what one becomes is partly a result of all those encounters. But at the same time I believe that the person who goes abroad has actually started travelling even before he or she physically leaves; it's as if the exile is within them. And it's that internal exile which particularly interests me: the fact that one has already left one's family, one's country, without actually having physically departed. I had taken a trip even before I left home because in my mind I'd wanted to have an encounter with other kinds of people; I knew there would be similarities between us, even though there would also be something in others that I didn't have, and something in me which they didn't have. It's like that with a family, where you're all related but each has a different identity and different interests.

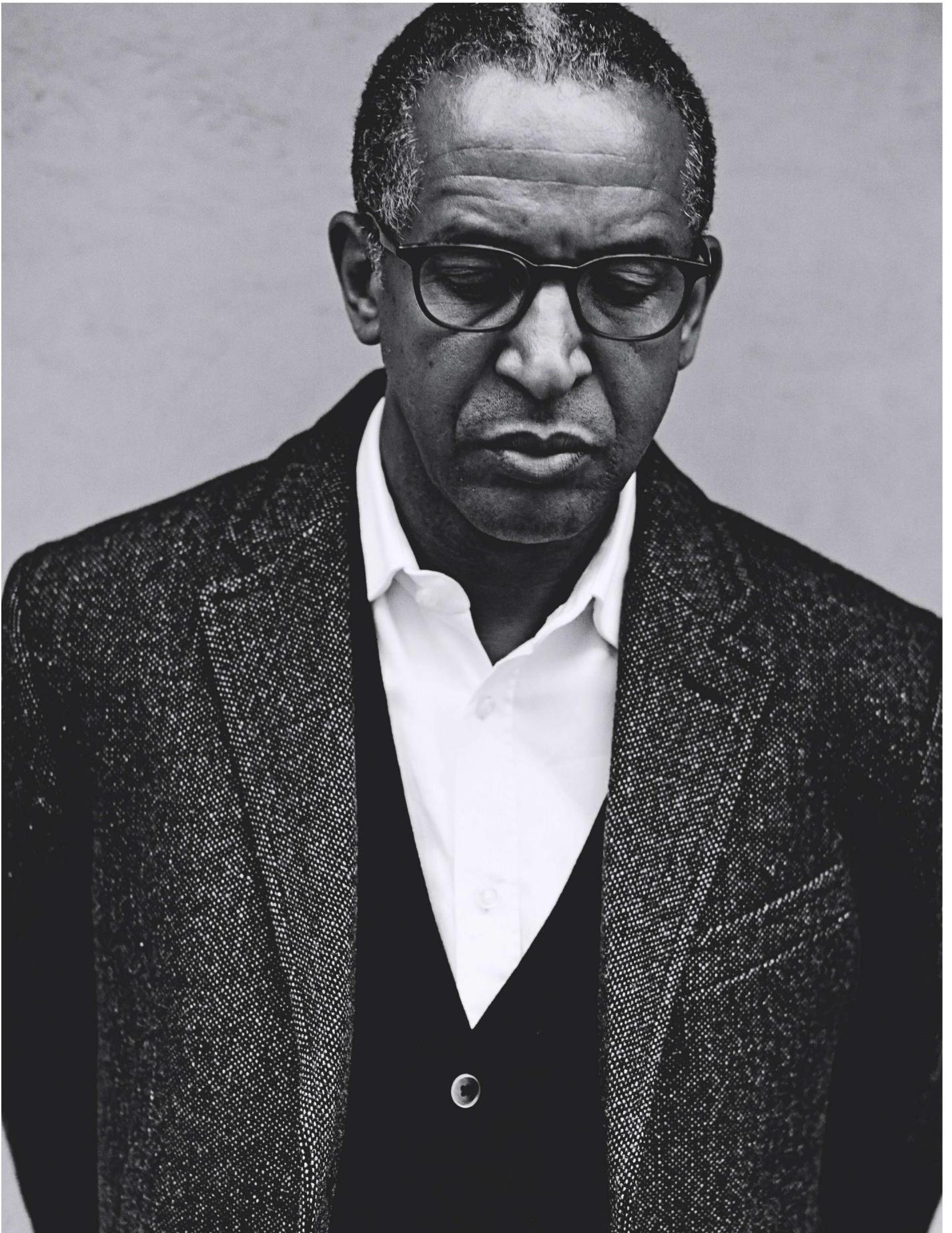
So it's not really the geographical journey that's so important. Sometimes when you travel you meet people who have never left their village but are perfectly happy with themselves and their lives. So learning isn't a matter of travelling or universities; it's a kind of predisposition, about being open to people.

GA: Your films are constructed in an almost impressionistic way, a little like jigsaw puzzles. How do you construct a film? What do you start with? A story idea, a character, a situation?

AS: I'm not sure I can give a satisfactory answer to that. My answer's rather like that of the famous Malian portrait photographer Seydou Keita, who's now sadly no longer with us. When asked by a journalist how he achieved



Timbuktu



such extraordinary results, he replied that he looked through the lens and took the photo. He then added, "Please don't make my work any more complicated." I'd like to reply along much the same lines. A lot of what I do is simply felt, rather than coming from cinematic technique; it's independent from the forms that film can take. And this can be explained by the fact that I came to cinema not out of a love of films but out of a love for my mother. And a love for life. That gives me real freedom. Because while there are filmmakers whose work I like a lot, I don't think I am influenced by cinema as such; as I said, I'm not really a cinephile.

It's also to do with the relationship one has with people. The people I film are to all intents and purposes anonymous and ordinary. They aren't heroic in the usual Western sense of the word: they haven't done anything newsworthy, they don't fit the usual notions of beauty. But they are, in fact, quite extraordinary in many ways, and that's what I like to speak about. So my approach has to be as simple and straightforward as they are. Consequently, my films bear little resemblance to American cinema and its many imitators. Films made in that style try to impose themselves on us, rather than inviting the viewer in – whereas I like to invite people to join me on a journey, because I believe that the viewer is like me, in terms of strengths and weaknesses. It's a relationship between equals.

GA: The films are not just about individuals, but about societies in transition: they're often about change, and the collision of tradition and modernity. Do you bear those things in mind when you embark on a film? How conscious are you in dealing with these themes, in wanting to engage with political issues?

AS: Everything I address in my films, I address intentionally; and I'm usually dealing with a world which the cinema rarely deals with. Generally, when the world speaks about my country, or indeed Africa in general, it does so in a tone which is, quite frankly, condescending, as if there's one continent which is simply wretched and others which are rich. The world may speak about Ebola on a daily basis, but it hardly ever mentions that the African continent is also beautiful, strong and moving forwards. It speaks of a continent that's poor, rather than of one that has been *made* poor – because as soon as one says that it's been made poor, one has to accept a degree of responsibility for the many inequalities that have been created in the world. And it's this that has led me to make films which may be described as political.

There is a kind of cinema which consists of very personal or intimate psychological studies of people having affairs or whatever. I'm perfectly happy to watch such films, but that's not the kind of cinema I myself feel like making. In Africa, making films is very far from a part of everyday life; it's extremely challenging. Consequently, many African filmmakers feel they have to make something that has a political dimension. That said, a political film is not simply about depicting reality, because art isn't necessarily about that. Art isn't practised just because it says something that is somehow 'right'. So form is very important, in that it becomes part of a dialogue

with the viewer. For me, at least, film is a kind of conversation with the viewer. I want to invite viewers to think, and become aware that we are all basically very similar; I want them to realise they are connected to the characters on screen.

So *Timbuktu* is all about that; it's why I made it. Something that is seldom acknowledged is that Islam, as a religion, has itself been taken hostage. The easy narrative, the one most often heard, is that it's Islam which is taking hostages. That's because the spotlight is almost exclusively shone on those who shout loudest in proclaiming themselves Muslims.

GA: *Waiting for Happiness* deals with hardship, inequality, migration, but does so in the gentlest way; there are even moments of humour. *Bamako* includes a spoof spaghetti western. There's also humour in *Timbuktu*. How important it is for you to have those kinds of tonal differences in a film?

AS: As I said, a film is a conversation about life. And in life, there's not just drama but comedy. Even in the very worst situations, even in a concentration camp, at some moment during a day there may be a moment when a small ray of hope appears, or a flicker of desire, or something amusing. The purpose of art is surely to reflect the many emotions that may affect us in life, so it should allow for beauty and optimism. If we're trying to communicate something, it's monotonous if we only shout; we need to use different tones. Sometimes a whisper conveys more than a scream. Moreover, what's left unsaid can be as revealing as what's said.

A film is made up of a great many elements: light, colour, sound, music, rhythm, as well as the more obviously dramatic components of the narrative. Someone recently said to me, "I like your films, but I find them a bit slow." I took that

Films made in the American style try to impose themselves on us – whereas I like to invite people to join me on a journey

as a compliment, and asked, "Who said cinema had to be fast?" Film is a language, and we all use it according to our own sensibility. There's enough uniformity as it is: Zara and H&M shops all over the world, for instance, making cities look all too alike. People who are used to a certain style of filmmaking often find it strange when they encounter something different. But for me, a film is something quite fragile; you have to help it come into being and survive. As in life, it's often the smallest things that matter most.

GA: How do you cast your films?

And do you direct professionals and non-professionals differently?

AS: Those of us who work in countries where filmmaking isn't commonplace often have to make do with the people we find around us; and since there's no film industry or theatre to speak of, they're not usually actors. What actors there are often go to live abroad, in London, Paris or somewhere, so we have to go and search them out. I don't find this a terrible situation or even regrettable; it's just the norm for me. In this kind of work, as in any relationship, the most important thing is trust. If you can establish trust quickly, you can build up someone's potential. So if I meet someone I think might be good to play my lead character, I give him my trust. Instead of doing auditions or screen tests, I go and have a cup of tea with him so that we can chat about life, and about my ambitions for the film. I let him know that I don't completely take charge; that I prefer to give some slack and remain open to possibilities.

An example: the lead in *Timbuktu* is not in fact an actor, but a Tuareg musician who lives in Spain; the woman who plays his wife is a singer from Niger who lives in Paris. Neither had appeared in a film before. When filming, I generally just gave them little things to do; unless someone actually wants to see the full script, I don't bother giving it to them, as it's not essential. And when it came to the scene where the main character is interrogated by the jihadists, there was just one thing I needed my actor to convey, and that was the character's love for his daughter: she's the most important thing in the world to



Force of evil: *Timbuktu* bears witness to the plight of ordinary people living under jihadist occupation

him. So that's all I told my actor. And everything you see in that scene came from him; the dialogue was not something I'd written. He dug deep within himself and came up with some words about the daughter bringing him milk every morning. That was all the actor's invention; I simply put my trust in him. Some professional actors are obviously capable of doing that, others less so. The same is true for non-actors.

Another example: initially the little girl in the film was supposed to be three years old. Then, around the time we were casting, I was at a Tuareg refugee camp and noticed a girl who was 12; her presence was such that I knew at once she'd be right for the part, and I changed the character's age. I do believe there's an element of magic in cinema, where suddenly something presents itself and you realise you need it, even though you had no idea until that moment that you needed such a thing. It's like what I said about travelling: you have to have a predisposition to be open to experience, to accept the unexpected.

GA: I'm reminded of the moment in *Bamako* when the man suddenly starts singing to the judges during the trial to express his anger. How did that come about and why did you decide not to translate his words with subtitles?

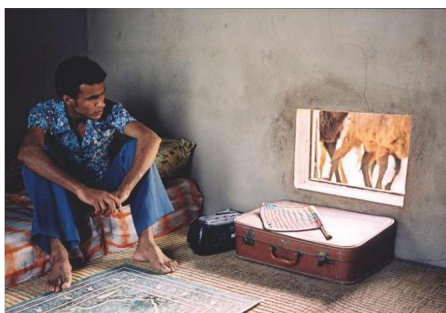
AS: That scene is very important to me. Two years before I shot *Bamako*, I went to Sikasso, a town in the south of Mali, and there was a competition for a balafon, a percussion instrument you find in Mali, Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso. Zugué Bamba, the old man you mentioned, is a balafon virtuoso. That day he decided to sing – for an hour – and afterwards I told him I'd like him to appear in the film I was preparing. "May God give us a long enough life," was his reply. Two years later, my assistant went and found him; he came to the shoot and was supposed to play one of the witnesses in the trial. In the film he's the first to arrive and wants to speak, but the judge tells him to sit down and wait. And when the old man goes to sit down, he simply says, "My words won't stay inside me."

Anyway, more than an hour later in the film, he suddenly starts to sing. That wasn't improvised, it was in my script. And I'd had to negotiate with him the night before, as I couldn't have him sing for an hour or more, given that the film itself is less than two hours. Happily, he accepted what I said, and only sang for 20 minutes.

It's important to remember that not a single person in that courtyard understood the language he was singing in: but so strong was the emotion in his cry from the heart that everyone there felt it and was transfixed. Hence the absence of subtitles. Something like that doesn't need to be translated; that's what I mean when I say that, in many respects, we're all basically the same.

GA: What made you want to make *Timbuktu*?

AS: It's always difficult to say what the real reason is. But one thing triggered the film, in July 2012, when the north of Mali was occupied by the jihadists. In one of the occupied villages, Aguelhok, the jihadists arrested a couple, whom they accused of adultery, and stoned them to death. Now even in those rare instances when this story was reported in the press, it was treated as if it wasn't of any great significance, whereas on the very same day, a new mobile



Waiting for Happiness (2002)

phone was launched, and the media all covered the story of the first person to buy the phone. We live in a world that's dumbing down day by day. Obviously the new telephone may have been important for the man who bought it, but why would his story be deemed important for the rest of us? Since 2012, after all, several more new phones have been launched.

To me what's most repellent and shocking is not so much the stoning itself – which is quite appalling enough – but the fact that everyone seems to be so indifferent to it. It's easy to voice indignation about such things, but voicing indignation is not an especially valuable response in itself; instead of simply taking offence, one needs to do something about it, at whatever level one can. There are many ways to act for the better – even something as simple as saying hello to a neighbour you've never bothered to acknowledge before. Or in my case, by making a film to bear witness to what is happening.

To do this allows us to understand certain things. We live in a world where suffering only seems to exist if it touches someone who looks like us. When someone slaughters [American journalist] James Foley, or an Englishman or a Frenchman, there's an outcry. I too am enraged by such killings, but those same butchers are each and every day slaughtering a great many other people, and amputating the limbs of a great many others; but those victims are not mentioned, because of our indifference to people who don't

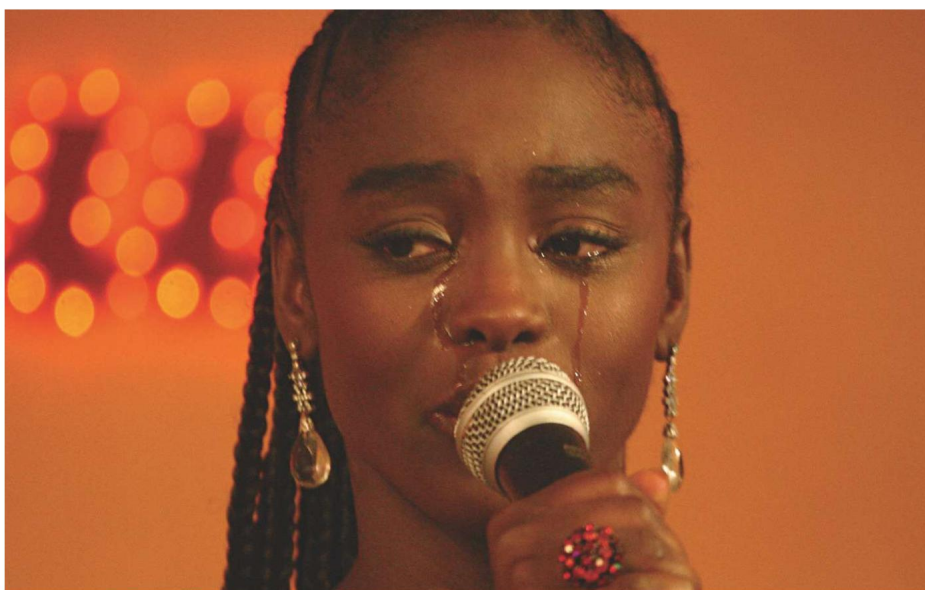


Rostov-Luanda (1997)

resemble us. The world behaves as if these events have only been happening in recent months, but that's not true. They've been happening for a long time. We shouldn't be indifferent to the suffering of others; apart from anything else, in time it will reach and affect us too.

People complain about Islam being a terrible religion, but that's not true; the people responsible for these atrocities have appropriated the religion for their own particular purposes and interests, which have nothing to do with Islam proper. Islam is a religion of compassion, forgiveness, dialogue – in the film you see those qualities in the imam. He also represents Timbuktu; it's a city I know well and have worked in, a city of encounters, exchanges and total acceptance of difference, including religion. The city was taken over by outsiders who said you can't do this and you must do that. Every day for a year people were humiliated and beaten just because they were singing; if they stole the slightest thing they'd have their limbs amputated. But that tends not to get mentioned. Instead we speak about five French hostages whose ransoms were paid. Though 25 million euros were paid for a ransom, the 5,000 euros needed to buy a generator to provide the locals with electricity could not be found. That is the absurd situation at the heart of the world we live in today. 

 **Timbuktu is released in UK cinemas on 29 May and is reviewed on page 87**



Veil of tears: Bamako explores the destructive effects of the IMF and World Bank's policies in Africa

THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

It's exactly 40 years since the concept of the 'male gaze' emerged from the heady subversions of the women's liberation movement

By Laura Mulvey

I have told bits of this story before in various essays over the years. But I am grateful to *Sight & Sound* for inviting me to bring the bits together and fill in some gaps for the 40th anniversary of the publication of my essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in 1975. Forty years is quite a long time: 1935, 40 years before 1975, is a date that would have seemed infinitely remote in the mid-1970s, standing for the Depression and the rise of fascism, with World War II still to come. I was born in 1941, six years after 1935, and a date in one's own lifetime should seem, at least, closer to the present. But now the 1970s seem almost as remote as the 1930s did then, relegated to another era, not perhaps by a world war but by a proliferation of wars, as well as by the seismic social, economic and political shifts associated with neoliberalism and globalisation. And, of course, technological change, the shift

from a celluloid and mechanical medium to digital, has profoundly affected not only how films are watched but also the ideological significance of spectatorship. (It was partly to underline the irrelevance of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' to contemporary modes of spectatorship that I wrote my book *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, 2006.) I recently pointed out that the essay might have acquired a new value precisely because of its age and the kind of archaic quality Walter Benjamin noted in the outdated technologies of the 19th century. Today, the essay stands primarily and emblematically for its own moment, actually becoming part of the film history that it has, so often, been accused of neglecting.

However, the historical moment that generated the essay was only secondarily to do with film and primarily to do with the political and intellectual context of the women's liberation movement (WLM). In the early 1970s I joined a women's liberation reading group (generally known as the Family Studies Group) in which we scrutinised key works by male theorists who had, across different intellectual disciplines, analysed structures of family life and the position of women within

it. After Engels and Lévi-Strauss, we moved on to Freud. In Freudian psychoanalysis we discovered concepts and a vocabulary that directly addressed questions of sexuality, gender and how the human subject is inducted into social life precisely through a regulation of sexuality, the Oedipus complex in which the male is valued above the female. This idea was fascinating as it seemed to pinpoint a 'fall from grace' for women, to be endlessly repeated through the social and psychical demands of patriarchy. Around the same time, I read Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony* (1933), which, with its detailed analysis of a phobic misogyny at the heart of late 19th-century culture, fitted well with Freud's concept of male castration anxiety. With the help of these sources, it was not difficult to decipher in certain images, often of surface enchantment, a kind of 'vernacular fetishism' that revealed not very hidden symptoms, a secret disgust that had everything to do with the 'patriarchal unconscious' and nothing to do with women apart from their oppression. This deciphering process not only provided feminism with a critical weapon but its practice was illuminating, enjoyable – even fun!

Furthermore, the early phases of the WLM had



Looking back: Laura Mulvey

PHOTOGRAPH BY KAREN KUOR

developed a politics of the female body as a site of oppression and struggle through, for instance, demands for women's rights over reproduction and their sexuality. A politics of the female body led logically to images of the female body, leading in turn to quite abstract issues of representation. Psychoanalytic theory, as well as semiotics, tore sexualised images of women out of any natural or referential framework, displacing their meaning back on to the society that had produced them. To sum up: while Hollywood cinema was the 'case in point' for 'Visual Pleasure...', and my previous (and first ever) essay had been about the pop artist Allen Jones, for both essays the argument's driving force was derived from psychoanalytic theory and the concept of a 'patriarchal' order. The idea was to use psychoanalysis to reveal the unconscious of patriarchy, and it was the perspective of feminist theory that made possible this perhaps paradoxical, political and intellectual venture/adventure.

But it would be wrong to underestimate the importance of Hollywood cinema for 'Visual Pleasure...' or, indeed, the idea of a new avant-garde film movement that runs through the essay. I have discussed this at greater length in the introduction to the second edition of *Visual and Other Pleasures* (2009), but I would like to make some points here. The early to mid-1970s were a turning point for film criticism and consciousness in the UK and, as I was a typical product of the times and their changes, the Hollywood/avant-garde axis is emblematic of that transitional moment, a state of being 'in between'. I wrote about Hollywood in 'Visual Pleasure...' for both personal and aesthetic reasons. In the first instance, because it was the cinema I had got to know best during a period of film-going, particularly under the influence of Peter Wollen, after leaving university in 1963 (with a poor degree in history from Oxford). Three factors brought this period to an end: the studio system movies that had nurtured this particular (*Cahiers du cinéma*-influenced) cinophilia were no longer being produced; new cinemas were emerging that introduced new, political, ways of thinking about film; and finally the WLM shocked me into seeing with new eyes the movies that I had loved so unquestioningly. Previously, I had quite happily, and probably unconsciously, watched Hollywood films with an assumed masculinity in keeping with the films' cinematic style and language. From this perspective, the 'Visual Pleasure...' essay is autobiographical: as my mode of spectatorship changed, the possibility of analysis and critique gradually emerged and so, too, did a desire for alternative, counter or avant-garde cinemas. But, as I said before, this desire was reflected in and reflects changing times. During the 70s there was a flourishing 'film scene' in the UK, defined and unified by extreme experiments in critical writing and filmmaking, movements that overlapped and influenced each other. It is sometimes forgotten that these theoretical essays and experimental films, often themselves experimenting with theory, did not, by and large, have an academic context. Even the 1970s *Screen* (which first published 'Visual Pleasure...'), an intellectual journal *par excellence* and quite unafraid of jargon, was funded by the British



How little we know...: Lauren Bacall, centre of attention in *To Have and Have Not* (1945)

Film Institute Education Department and pre-existed university film departments in the UK.

But the Hollywood cinema that I knew so well was, to my mind, supremely appropriate for this kind of feminist psychoanalytic experiment. Partly because of the star system, the films were very often 'about' gender roles, sexualities and excessive erotic display, combined with containment and regimentation; Freud's active and passive instincts, complex in his theory, could be found very literally embodied in screen masculinity or femininity. The psychoanalytic concepts of voyeurism and fetishism were built into Hollywood's structuring cinematic language (camera movement, editing, shot/counter-shot, lighting, sound, etc) and pleasure in a controlling gaze fused with pleasure in a highly evolved cinematic style; and both could be invested in the figure of spectacular femininity. Originally, although the idea disappeared from the final essay, I had hoped to suggest that the aesthetics of fetishism and voyeurism could reveal Hollywood's own cinematic specificity through the ways in which the apparatus, *mise en scène* and mode of address were not so much transparent as gendered. Hitchcock, and even more so Sternberg, still stand as exemplars of this discarded idea.

But to look back from *now*, from the perspective of a changed and variable relationship of spectator to screen, to the cinematic experience of *then* is also to realise the key importance of the material specificity of the cinema experience. The darkness of the theatre, the brightness of the screen, the intensity of involvement, the loss of a sense of self, were all essential to the theorisation of 'Visual Pleasure...'. This is a further reminder of the 'in-between' nature of that moment: VHS tape had already appeared in the 1970s, and became

Partly because of the star system, the films were very often 'about' gender roles, sexualities and excessive erotic display

widely available by the early 1980s, bringing with it inevitable changes in film spectatorship that accelerated over the subsequent decades.

The style of 'Visual Pleasure...' roots it firmly in its political moment but also in my personal trajectory. In keeping with the principles of the WLM, I wanted to make the essay speak generally for women and play down my role as writer; this is manifested in the use, or lack of use, of personal pronouns. Occasionally, the first person plural appears ('we' or 'our'), in keeping with the rhetoric of the WLM, but not the first person singular. This feminist investment in collectivity fitted well with my personal difficulties with writing. I had left university convinced that I would never again struggle to put my thoughts on paper, and had not done so between 1963 and 1973. But a sense of belonging to a movement gave me a new purpose: it could be useful to try to articulate ideas about women's oppression, the concept of patriarchy, etc, and avoidance of the self made expression easier. Also, in terms of style, there was a rhetorical flourish in my use of the male third-person singular, with the female equivalent conspicuous by its absence, which was intended to draw attention to the masculinised nature of culture in general, as well as of Hollywood modes of spectatorship.

Needless to say, modes of spectatorship were always more complex than the 'Visual Pleasure...' essay allowed and the 'male gaze' could always be transgressed by anyone who cared to assert their own sexual identity or proclivity, which might have involved reading against the grain or intuiting a subversive instinct already there on the screen. But now, inventing and imagining one's own mode of spectatorship is a matter of a simple push on a button: by delaying the flow of a film, pausing it on a favourite star or moment, thought and pleasure are fused and confused. Old films can now surrender hidden secrets that had been held in waiting for this new era. 📺

i Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's *Riddles of the Sphinx* is available on DVD and Blu-ray from the BFI

REVOLUTION IN SOUND

The sound designer and composer Trevor Mathison has been creating complex, original film soundscapes for more than 30 years

By Ashley Clark

The trailblazing Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC) was officially formed in 1982, but began working together as a loose group of fellow students and friends at Portsmouth Polytechnic two years earlier. The group consisted of seven multimedia artists and thinkers from backgrounds in fine art, sociology and psychology; they curated programmes of avant-garde and anti-colonial world cinema and made their own work using film, slide-tape texts and video. It's no accident that their name gave equal billing to audio and film: sound was every bit as important as image in their kaleidoscopic, multilayered output. This remained the case when, after a shuffle of membership in the mid-1990s, BAFC re-emerged as Smoking Dogs Films – the name under which they operate today.

The group's ever-present composer and sound designer is Trevor Mathison, who was born in London, of Jamaican heritage, in 1960. His intricate, bricolage-style work incorporates elements of dub and *musique concrète*, and acts as a binding agent for the group's disparate styles and complex sociopolitical themes. John Akomfrah, Smoking Dogs' in-house director, cites Mathison as a key collaborator: "The musical worlds of these films take the form they do partly because I've worked for so long with Trevor," he told Daniel Trilling in an interview for *Sound on Film* in 2011. "We're both very interested in noise, for want of a better word: what Trevor at one point called the 'post-soul noise'. These are sounds that take their cue from pre-existing black musics... but they've been defamiliarised, put through a sonic box that renders them strange and unusual."

For an example of these strange, unusual sounds, consider *Handsworth Songs* (1986), Akomfrah's bracing essay film about social unrest in inner-city Birmingham and London, which invites the viewer to reflect on how mainstream news grossly simplifies complex structural issues. Mathison's use of vocal loops, political broadcasts, dubby beats and surging electronics evokes the works of the reggae sound system pioneer Jah Shaka and the industrial act Cabaret Voltaire, at the same time facilitating a revolutionary approach to imparting information in nonfiction form. As Jean Fisher suggested, in an excellent book of essays about the BAFC, *The Ghosts of Songs* (2007), the film boasts "a polyvocality of recorded testimonies and intercessional poetic voiceovers that, contrary to the 'explanatory' panoptical impulse of the documentary narrator, build an oblique relation to the audiovisual track". The soundtrack for the earlier slide-tape text *Expeditions One: Signs of Empire* (1982), meanwhile, combines shards of political oratory with found sounds in a manner reminiscent of David Byrne and Brian Eno's disturbing 1981 LP *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. During live performances the soundtrack was amplified to create an immersive environment of dread.



'Quiet, centrifugal force': Trevor Mathison

As well as conjuring fractured, haunting aural landscapes, Mathison excels at integrating existing music to imaginative effect. In Akomfrah's *Who Needs a Heart* (1991) – a bleak docudrama about Michael X (aka Michael DeFreitas), the London-based self-styled revolutionary of the 1960s – avant-garde jazz largely stands in for dialogue. Why imagine words, the film seems to ask, when the feral, squawking horns of Albert Ayler, Ornette Coleman or Eric Dolphy can evoke the pain and paranoia of the characters and the era? Jazz is also in the foreground in Akomfrah's *The Stuart Hall Project* (2013), which matches the melancholy-suffused music of Miles Davis with various

Mathison's tape loops make 'the imperial anxieties of the early 20th century resonate... with the multiple fears of the present'

archival recordings of the scholar in a moving, time-collapsing duet ("When I was 18 or 19," Hall says in the film, "Miles Davis put his finger on my soul"). In the postcolonial historical collage *The Nine Muses* (2010), Mathison's scope is at its widest: he blends a breathtaking range of classical readings with liturgical works by Arvo Pärt, Negro spirituals and Indian courtly music. Mathison also



Handsworth Songs (1986)



The Nine Muses (2010)

makes a rare appearance in front of the camera, playing a silent, deadpan wanderer stranded in a succession of ice-white Alaskan landscapes.

In *The Last Angel of History* (1996), an essay film-cum-Afrofuturist fantasy, interviews with esteemed black writers, cultural critics and, most plentifully, musicians (including George Clinton, Lee 'Scratch' Perry, and the Detroit techno pioneers Derrick May and Carl Craig) are interwoven with the fictional story of a 'data thief' who must travel through space and time in search of the code that holds the key to his – and the black diaspora's – future. Yet, surprisingly, almost none of the cited artists' music is deployed in the film. "*Last Angel* proved conclusively to both me and Trevor that you could actually use your own sounds to bring [these worlds] into being," Akomfrah told Trilling.

Mathison's work isn't limited to the BAFC/Smoking Dogs continuum. In March 2001 he, ex-BAFC member Edward George and Anna Piva, under the name Flow Motion, created a digital audiovisual installation entitled *Dissolve*, based on Michelangelo Antonioni's countercultural adventure *Zabriskie Point* (1970). Recently, Mathison celebrated ten years of collaboration with fellow sound designer Gary Stewart under the moniker dubmorphology. Based in London, they conceptualise, produce and perform audiovisual events and installations largely based on themes of race, nationhood and memory. Mathison, who in person is softly spoken and self-effacing, explains the difference in approach between BAFC/Smoking Dogs and his collaboration with Stewart: "When it comes to working with John [Akomfrah], my thing is not to compete with the rest of the way the film has been set up – to complicate the situation by putting rhythms against another set of rhythms. The films have a very precise alchemy, a different kind of poetry. When Gary and I are doing our stuff, we can wig out," he says.

One of dubmorphology's most recent projects was the ambitious *Mission to the Land of Misplaced Memories*, an event in February this year at Tate Britain in London that revolved around a "memory collection spaceship". This was a collaboration with the writer Gaylene Gould, who told me about their process: "We sat piecing together ideas and concepts, trying to map the complex mess of human behaviour. Trevor, who is also an accomplished artist, would quietly draw a sketch that perfectly encompassed what we'd been trying to grasp. The swiftness with which he is able to embody a complex idea is astounding. I'm convinced he's a wizard."

Mathison is reluctant to sing his own praises, but others are keen to highlight his crucial role in the artistic landscape of the past four decades. The cultural critic Kodwo Eshun has hailed Mathison's pioneering use of tape loops for making "the imperial anxieties of the early 20th century resonate... with the multiple fears of the present". Gould, meanwhile, praises Mathison as "the quiet centrifugal force behind what we now recognise as a black British aesthetic. Essentially, he helped re-imagine how sound and image can work differently to carry an African diasporic motif." It is heady, justified acclaim for a quiet man behind a sustained revolution in sound. 📍

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

A small Scottish film festival is offering some valuable lessons in how to bring silent films to new audiences



By Pamela Hutchinson

We're familiar with the technique of adding a new score to an old film. Here's another experiment: adding a new audience. This March, on a blustery Saturday night in the Scottish town of Bo'ness (population around 15,000) crowds gathered at the local cinema for a sold-out screening of Mikhail Kalatozov's brutal montage film *Salt for Svanetia* (1930). This arresting Soviet propaganda piece, which uses often-shocking images to portray the hand-to-mouth existence of the Svan and condemn their religious customs, is the kind of movie you might expect to see only at a metropolitan arthouse cinema – but the ice-cream, and the welcome, wouldn't be so sweet.

The Hippodrome Festival of Silent Cinema in Bo'ness, affectionately shortened to Hippfest, screens early films where they were first seen: in a 1912-vintage cinema, lovingly restored to its mid-20s Art Deco splendour. The Hippodrome is a dream of a picture palace – plush and happily old-school. The circular auditorium has a balcony, a star-spangled midnight-blue ceiling, a small stage and a screen crowned with a red-and-gold sunburst mural. Usually, it screens new releases to an exceptionally lucky group of local filmgoers, but once a year it embraces its past and returns to the silent era.

The festival's emphasis is on spreading the love: showcasing the diversity of silent cinema, and tempting the residents of nearby Falkirk into the Hippodrome to enjoy it. For a week Bo'ness becomes Pordenone's northern twin town. A silent mania envelops the streets surrounding the cinema, which are decked out with banner posters, a red carpet for the gala screenings, specially decorated shop windows and many yards of bunting.

The festival attracts visitors from across the UK – devotees who return each year – and I spoke to one chap from as far away as Wisconsin; but it's a local event at heart. Photographs of silent film stars are on display in the library; the steam railway opens up a little earlier in the year to host an outdoor screening of train-themed films.

When I visited Hippfest this year for its fifth instalment, I tried to imagine how it would work as an introduction to silent movies. The answer is: possibly bewildering, but definitely bold. A silent-film newbie at Bo'ness would watch a combination of slapstick favourites, archive snippets and little-seen films that any buff would yearn to catch on the big screen.

The spine of the festival is four gala screenings, three of them boasting heavyweight stars who would have been sure to fill the Hippodrome in years gone by. William S. Hart led the fire-and-brimstone

The Hippodrome is a dream of a picture palace – plush and happily old-school



Hipp hooray: the audience at Hippfest

western *Hell's Hinges* (1916), and we also saw Colleen Moore in the witty if antiquated flapper romcom *Synthetic Sin* (1929), as well as Lillian Gish in tartan and tears for *Annie Laurie* (1927); *Salt for Svanetia* was the fourth gala. None of these is what you would call a staple: the Moore film has only recently been restored by The Vitaphone Project, and only *Salt for Svanetia* is available on DVD in the UK.

If those star names aren't the crowd-pullers they once were – Hart and Moore are all but forgotten – there was a buzz about the musicians accompanying the films. The Dodge Brothers, the Americana skiffle band whose line-up includes the critic Mark Kermode, may have been responsible for the throng that arrived to see William S. Hart saddle up. Their part-time member Neil Brand sat behind the piano for a second night to partner Colleen Moore in her adventures on the wrong side of the tracks. The Scottish klezmer band Moishe's Bagel accompanied Kalatozov's bruising documentary in such fine style that the feel-bad film left the audience clapping and cheering. And the fiddler Shona Mooney tapped into the romantic spirit of *Annie Laurie*, closing the festival with thunderous applause and the squelch of damp handkerchiefs.

This is not a matter of Hippfest attracting great musicians: rather, it fosters them and shares them. Moishe's Bagel will tour with *Salt for Svanetia* across Scotland, and Mooney has already reprised her score for *Annie Laurie* at the Barbican in London; those scores were both commissioned by the festival.

Five years in, Hippfest may well be educating audiences about the joys of silent cinema – but it also has something to teach programmers everywhere. Lure in the punters with the charms of classic cinema, and they will stay with you for Kalatozov's gruelling but exhilarating montage. 📍

TAIT OF GRACE

The filmmaker and poet Margaret Tait was an uncompromising, singular talent and her work deserves to be more widely seen

By Nick Roddick

Even during her lifetime, sightings of Margaret Tait were rare. Although she spent time in the Far East during World War II and studied film in Rome in the 1950s, most of her life was lived in Scotland: in Edinburgh in the 50s and 60s she was close to, but not part of, the Rose Street poets, a group that included Hugh MacDiarmid, Sorley MacLean and Norman MacCaig. But mainly and most productively she lived in Orkney, where she was born in 1918 and died in 1999. She made 32 short films and one feature (*Blue Black Permanent*, 1992) and published three books of poems. The feature is not available on DVD, and rights to half the films are held by the artists' moving image agency Lux, which does its best to ensure that they are always projected, as intended, in front of an audience. Admirable, doubtless, but the effect is to make Tait's work even more difficult to see. *Rara avis* indeed, but an artist with one of the most singular visions in British cinema.

The latest Tait sighting, in February, was in Pamplona in Spain, at the Punto de Vista Film Festival (back, after a one-year hiatus, under the enthusiastic leadership of Basque filmmaker and writer Oskar Alegria). Among other things, the festival offered a Tait retrospective, introduced by Sarah Neely from the University of Stirling, who edited a 2012 collection of Tait's poems; she also helped put together a booklet including texts by and about Tait, together with some of the poems.

The retrospective contained 19 films ranging in length from two to 35 minutes, divided (not entirely comfortably) into three programmes: 'Portraits', 'Poems' and 'Landscapes'. Watching a feature-length programme of Tait's short films can be daunting, a little like reading an entire volume of poetry in one sitting, but the riches revealed more than make up for that.

The first thing to be said about Tait is



Pavement artist: Hugh MacDiarmid: *A Portrait* (1964)

that she did it her way. She detested the idea of artistic fashion, whose dishonesty and hollowness she excoriated in a 1957 poem:

"Empty it out and put in what they said.

Sshh! Don't mention the truth.

Fill it all full of tricks and gewgaws,

Then you'll win".

Tait didn't care about winning. Indeed, one of the key questions about her work – who did she make her films for? – can only really be answered: herself. She cared passionately about film – its rhythms, its colours, the images it could bring to and hold for our attention. If there is any link to other parts of British film history, it is to the 1940s work of Humphrey Jennings, who steered the documentary film into poetic waters. But Tait is not a documentary

Tait is not a documentary filmmaker: she is a poet of the everyday, constructing films like lines of verse or pieces of music

filmmaker: she is a poet of the everyday, constructing films like lines of verse or (the analogy she was most fond of) pieces of music, the syntax determined by the image, not the subject the image refers to. Even when she is apparently portraying a person or an action – in *A Portrait of Ga* (1952), *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait* (1964) or *Land Makar* (1981) – the films work through imagery and the rhythm of editing rather than any correspondence to the external world. The green dress worn by Ga (Tait's mother) and the purple of the hillside heather are the overwhelming signifiers of the film, as is the Orkney landscape into which the indomitable farmer Mary Graham Sinclair (the 'subject' of *Land Makar*) seems to blend.

Tait felt that she was written out as a poet by the early 1960s, whereas with film she felt she "could go on forever". Her films observe a series of very ordinary scenes – a beach, a hillside, a stream, a room, a flower, a window – to the point where something more vibrant appears. It was the editing phase she loved most, since that was where the 'poem' began to emerge. The result is hypnotic, as much in the early films – there are few more perfect images of happiness than the flowers, bees, and children playing in *Happy Bees* (1955) – as in the later, more complex *Where I Am Is Here* (1964), which may well be her masterpiece.

Tait's films are home movies in a special sense of the term. *Place of Work* (1976) begins with a cursory pan over some filmmaking and editing material before devoting the rest of its length to her house and garden. Home was where she worked, but work was also home.

The house in *Place of Work* was demolished shortly after it was made, so the film is a kind of *in memoriam* – a phrase that could apply to Tait's entire career. Like her near-contemporary Dylan Thomas but less flamboyantly, she was in the business of seizing the light before it died. 

 Films by Margaret Tait can be viewed at the Scottish Screen Archive (ssa.nls.uk); poems and readings are at www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poets/margaret-tait. The *Margaret Tait Reader* can be bought from lux.org.uk



All about my mother: *A Portrait of Ga* (1952)

DREAMING IN THE DARK

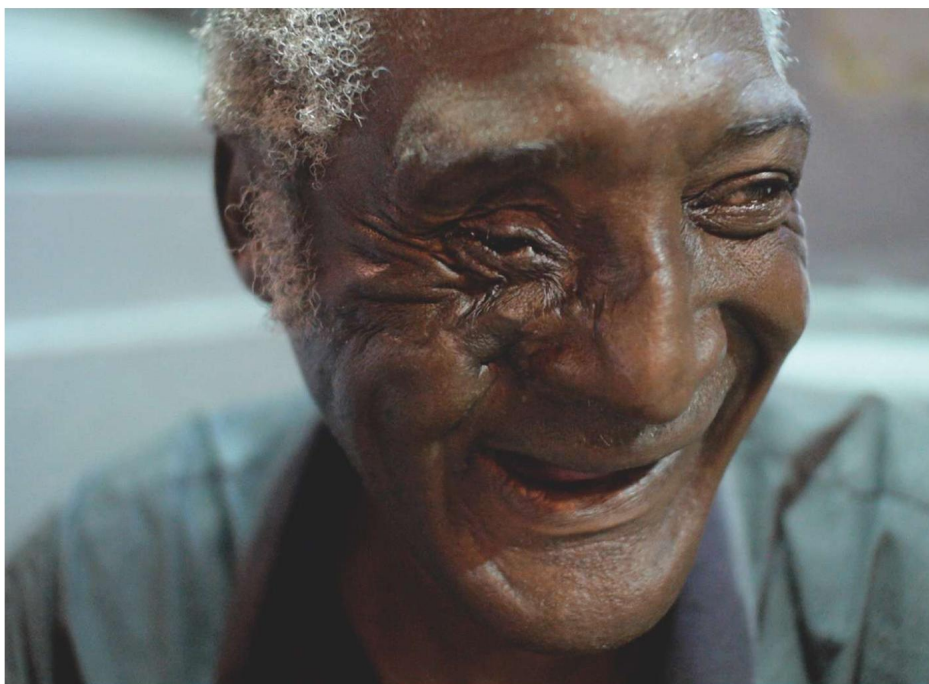
Khalik Allah's *Field Niggas* is an intense, hallucinatory vision of life among 'the most lowly' in night-time New York

By Sukhdev Sandhu

"Growing up listening to hip-hop, all the drug dealers had one corner that they owned; they were territorial. Now I feel like I'm slinging visual crack on 125th and Lexington." Khalik Allah is talking about the corner of Harlem that he has been filming at night over the last few years, populated by a ragged community of prostitutes, drug addicts, schizophrenics and homeless men and women. "I use a Nikon F2: it was the most used camera in Vietnam. I feel like I'm in a war zone, a specific corner that mostly goes unreported by people. The only other cameras there are surveillance cameras. No other photographer goes there at night. Nor would the people there allow them to."

By day, the self-taught Allah is a master control operator for AMC Networks, watching television eight hours a day, monitoring commercials, ensuring channel idents don't slip or do anything weird. His debut feature, the 60-minute-long *Field Niggas* is all about slips and weirdness, though. It is a portrait of nocturnal Harlem that refuses the visual language of ethnography or journalistic dispatch, instead presenting a hyperreal dreamscape of individuals at once broken and beautiful. In woozy slow motion, their unsynched but often articulate voices offering a parallel audio document of funny and heartbreaking exchanges, they display their wounds, guns, disfigurements. It is easily the most distinctive vision of subaltern New York since *Dark Days* (2000), Marc Singer's stygian portrait of the 'mole people' living below the city's rail-tracks.

Light is the key to *Field Niggas*. Allah used only the light available from storefronts, lampposts and passing ambulances: "The film I use is 160 ISO – that's for daytime, that's for shooting Jamaica at noon. So to use a 160 ISO with no flash at night: it makes the film struggle, and that struggle the film is experiencing mirrors the struggle of the environment and the neighbourhood." At various moments he invokes light to talk about his intentions ("I'm interested in the challenge of finding beauty – the light in the darkness"), the film itself ("Movies like this are there as a lantern, as a candle") and



Harlem breakdown: *Field Niggas*

The film may draw charges of voyeurism. Locals sometimes told him, 'No brother. We don't want to be seen like that'

sometimes even himself ("I kind of feel I'm Christ with a camera – I'm going among the most lowly, those who other people would avoid").

In the film's intensity and proximity there are shades of Harmony Korine's *Julien Donkey-Boy* (1999) as well as echoes of Geoffrey Fletcher's book *Down Among the Meths Men* (1966), in which the author offers advice on how to study the urban homeless: "Give them six foot clearance if you are still sensitive about fellow travellers, that being the average length of a hefty flea's jump." The film may draw charges of voyeurism. On the streets, when Allah was taking pictures of "a woman crackhead who was giving me the middle finger and had a pacifier in her mouth", he says locals sometimes told him, "No brother. We don't want to be seen like that."

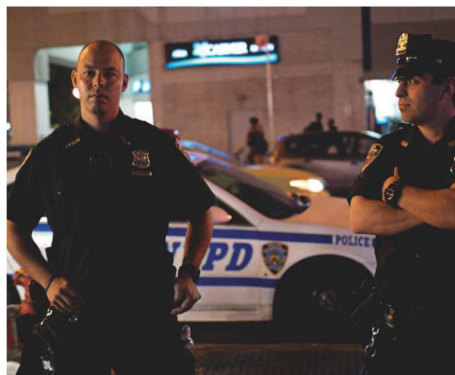
Black people, it sometimes seems, aren't really

seen in contemporary New York. Stop-and-frisk policing, industrial-scale incarceration, gentrification-triggered displacement: the city's black population is declining for the first time in over a century. The smartphone-captured killing of Eric Garner suggested that even when they're choking to death black people are in important ways invisible.

Allah, who was born in 1985, stages a prolonged, profoundly ambiguous encounter. He forces audiences to look at, wonder about, see into the faces – and souls – of people, some of them white, regarded as contemptible by the brandscapers of boom-time Manhattan. These people appear to be looking at us: "A lot of them weren't able to differentiate between the still camera that I take photos with and the video camera I was shooting the movie with. So they're posing for a very long time expecting me to take just one image." In that sustained, sometimes tense waiting, something miraculous and hard to articulate happens: the bloodied and disfigured, the burbling and grandstanding smokers of K2 (the 'synthetic cannabis' that's more damaging than the real thing) become radiant.

"When I was a kid I used to go into my mother's room and pull out the family photo albums my mom had made and study them like I was studying Garry Winogrand," recalls Allah. "I can see how that affected me today because of what I noticed on 125th Street and Lexington. These people have forged a relationship. They've made a tight family bond where before they were complete strangers that circumstances brought together."

Harlem is changing fast though – more commercial, pricier, more middle class. The homeless in *Field Niggas* will likely be further effaced. "One guy called the film a 'future artefact'. In the future there's not going to be any corner like this in Harlem. The whole area might turn into Broadway." 📍



Police presence: *Field Niggas*



Suffer the children: *Field Niggas*

new wave films



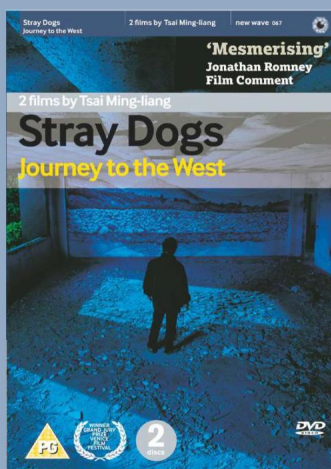
Stray Dogs

Journey to the West
Tsai Ming-liang

The latest film by visionary director Tsai Ming-liang links together a series of sumptuously composed scenes that tell the story of a broken family living on the margins of Taipei society. As one mysterious scene gives way to the next, we come to know something of their history, a time when they had a home.

Journey to the West is part of the *Walker* series, a meditative slow walk through Marseilles.

● Available on DVD 26 May. Double disc also includes a master-class with Tsai Ming-liang at the Cinémathèque Française.



'Every shot of *Stray Dogs* has been built with utter formal mastery; every sequence exerts an almost telepathic grip.'

Robbie Collin, *The Daily Telegraph*

'The last three shots are some of the most extraordinary ever committed to film.'

David Jenkins, *Little White Lies*

Argerich

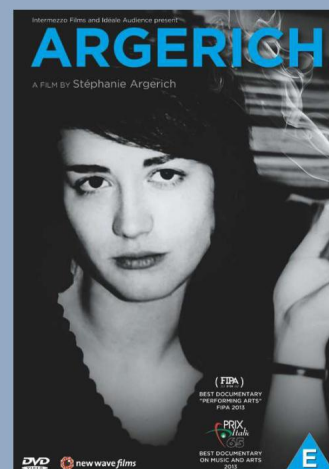
Stéphanie Argerich

The world-renowned pianists Martha Argerich and Stephen Kovacevich, are seen here under the scrutiny of their daughter Stéphanie. *Argerich* is a warm, intimate, and often funny family portrait that questions the relationship between the public life of a revered figure and her life as a mother to her three daughters.

A remarkable journey into the Argerich galaxy, with all its idiosyncrasies, problems, and, most importantly, love of music.

● Available on DVD and download 26 May.

The DVD also includes a filmed performance of Martha Argerich playing Chopin's Piano Concerto No 1.



'A masterpiece of intimacy and restraint...a riveting essay on what passes, and what must not pass, between mother and daughter. Acutely painful and funny, it cries out to be seen.'

Norman Lebrecht, *Arts Journal*

'A nuanced examination of how familial life interacts with the obsessiveness of a true artist.'

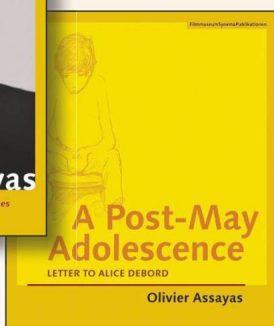
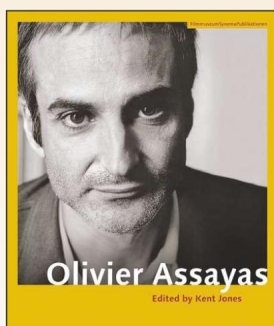
Hannah McGill, *Sight & Sound*

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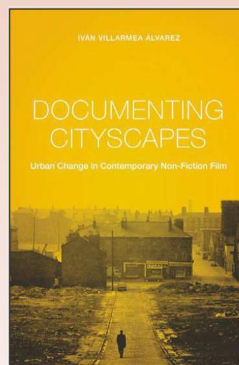
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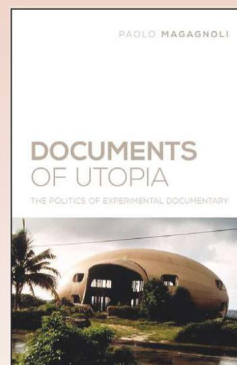
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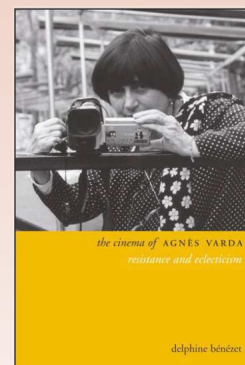
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Reviews



89 **Top Five**

Writer-director Chris Rock gives popular romance a smart, contemporary spin, while the format in which we follow two adults over a single day and night recalls the introspective walk-and-talk of Richard Linklater's 'Before...' films



58 Films of the month



66 Films



94 Home Cinema



104 Books



In the line of fire: *The Dorkels* has an unobtrusive naturalism that accommodates striking images while generally having the sense not to linger on them

The Dorkels

France 2014

Director: Jean-Charles Hue

Certificate 15 98m 46s



Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Jean-Charles Hue's *The Dorkels*, his third full-length film and second (more-or-less) fiction feature, might be classified as an ethnographic genre piece.

Hue's principal performers – Frédéric and Moïse Dorkel, Jason François, Mickaël Dauber – are all veterans of his 2010 *The Lord's Ride*, and they are all Yéniches, an itinerant Northern European group of ambiguously Celtic or Teutonic origins who are culturally quite near to the Romany, with whom they live in close proximity. (Or, if you prefer to go by a staggeringly condescending *Hollywood Reporter* write-up, they're "the closest thing Europe may have to the gun crazy communities of America's Deep South".)

The original French title of Hue's film, under which it played Directors' Fortnight at Cannes in 2014 and won the Prix Jean Vigo, was *Mange tes morts*. This phrase, apparently, is the vilest of insults among French Yéniches (it translates as "eat your dead"), though for the film's UK release, distributor Capricci has changed the title to something evoking one of those leering reality-TV shows that allow viewers a safe vantage from which to snigger at the uncouth behaviour of – depending on the country in which it airs – chavs, *ploucs*, hillbillies or what have you. In fairness, much of *The Dorkels* is untranslatable, delivered in the argot of the Yéniches, which includes words such as *chmidts* ('police', translated as 'filth').

Hue, by his own testimony, has been shooting the Yéniches for over a decade now, having first encountered them when he was studying film at the Cergy-Pontoise school of arts – the fact that his mother's maiden name was Dorkel apparently helped him make his way into the rather closed community. *The Lord's Ride* was a demi-documentary, demi-fiction creation, incorporating footage shot over a number of years, while *The Dorkels* is more firmly ensconced in fiction territory. Its basic plot mechanism is very, very simple. Eighteen-year-old Jason (François), who lives in a Yéniche community in Haute-Normandie, is about to join the Church – since the 1950s there has been a strong evangelical Christian tradition among the Yéniches – when his eldest half-brother Fred (Frédéric Dorkel) comes home fresh from doing 15 years in jail for killing a cop, bringing back with him the entire family history of lawless brigandry. Fred piles Jason, middle brother Mickaël (Dauber) and cousin Moïse (Moïse Dorkel) into his now vintage BMW Alpina and takes them out on a job, to *tchouraver* (steal) 25 tons of copper scrap. The night will be a test for young Jason, in which he'll have to decide what world he belongs to – to walk with Jesus, or to ride with thieves.

It is a rather straightforward parable, but in certain circumstances the possibilities are just that stark – and it should be said that Hue shows a greater feeling for the place that religion has as an everyday, matter-of-fact presence in the lives of the poor than the Dardennes, who tend to reduce Christianity to bloodless tropes easily acceptable to apostates.

Hue has assembled a remarkable posse of non-professional actors, clearly comfortable with one another and trusting of their gadjo

director. In the early scenes at the trailer park, you have a sense of the performers being prodded into delivering expected exposition – sins of the fathers and all that – but once the script has them caught up in the spirit of their plan (and having ingested a few spirits), the movie, which largely takes place during the course of a single night, gives itself over to the pleasure of watching their roughhousing interplay.

These are faces that are not often enough seen on screen – comparisons to the work of Bruno Dumont and *Gummo* (1997) are perhaps inevitable, though Hue himself has stated his affinity with the saddlesore ensemble films of Sam Peckinpah, and is much closer to the lyrical Larry Clark than to the class clown Korine. François, who looks a bit like *Malcolm in the Middle*'s Frankie Muniz used to, is a dark, rather inwardly directed kid with a chip of a scar across the bridge of his nose – nothing compared with the gouge that crosses the bullfrog throat of towering Frédéric. (Perhaps my favourite moment of Frédéric's performance is when, out of earshot of the others, he discreetly asks for directions from the cashier at a roadside fast-food restaurant, after boasting of his getaway driver's mental map of all the backroads and alleys of the region.) Moïse, the pragmatic outsider, along to look after François but also to get some jollies of his own (he married at 17 and never

Comparisons to the work of Bruno Dumont and 'Gummo' are perhaps inevitable, though Hue himself has stated his affinity with the films of Sam Peckinpah

ILLUSTRATION BY ANDY SMITH



In the company of men: largely taking place over a single night, the film gives itself over to the pleasure of the roughhousing interplay of its main characters

tried the bandit lifestyle on for size), is built like a fire hydrant, one of a brood of translucently pale boys with freckle-splashed faces whom we encounter. I suppose that would make Dauber the group's heartthrob, but although fighting fit he seems as helpless as everyone else in the face of Frédéric's legend-in-his-own-mind bravado. (In his reminiscences, he paints himself as a sort-of Yéniche Robin Hood.) They have, no doubt about it, chemistry and even a certain star power – witness a *Télérama* profile that details their fish-out-of-water presence at Cannes.

Hue, with his quite young and quite gifted DP Jonathan Ricquebourg, has given his film a distinct visual identity, an unobtrusive naturalism that is loose-limbed yet never obfuscating, that accommodates striking images while generally having the sense not to linger on them in self-satisfaction, and is occasionally fringed with a suggestion of mystery beyond. Much of *The Dorkels* takes place around industrial-park no-man's-lands, and the filmmakers have an unusual sensitivity to this atmosphere, to the stark beauty of a corrugated metal warehouse lit by a single incandescent lamp. (Single, overwhelming light sources are a recurring visual motif, motivated perhaps by the film's underplayed spiritual crucible.) The influence of Peckinpah is most evident when Hue digresses to watch the death throes of a watchman left mortally wounded by the Dunkels' bungled heist in a mist-shrouded scrapyard, a scene that seems to invoke the last moments of Slim Pickens's gutshot sheriff in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*. (There's no 'Knocking on Heaven's Door' – though the score, by Vincent-Marie Bouvot, is used sparingly and effectively.)

This quiet, private moment of passing, in which we witness through a dying man's eyes the

last images that he will see in this world, touches on the transcendent in a way no other moment in *The Dorkels* does. Rather than narrowing the perspective of his film to align us with Jason's subjective experience, which happens only briefly and with mixed success, Hue prefers to make room for knockabout ensemble play. In some ways this, his film's greatest strength, is also a limitation, for because Jason isn't exclusively focused on, the issue of his soul hanging in the balance is less than central, and his 'climactic' baptism has the feeling of a foregone conclusion. Which, after a fashion, it is – when life offers you only two options, coming to belief is less a matter of religious fervour than process of elimination.

Romany, gypsies, travellers, whatever the

name you prefer, are and have long been attractive to filmmakers, for reasons that hardly need to be gone into – they offer the violence of lives lived on the fringe, a 'colourful' culture, underdog romance. All of which any director worth their salt should be duty-bound to resist when approaching the subject: a prime example is Ioanis Nuguet's 2014 *Spartacus & Cassandra*, a fiction-documentary hybrid about two immigrant Romany children in France being taken from their irresponsible parents and integrated into the republic kicking and screaming. While Hue's *The Dorkels* buys into the mythology of the Yéniches – warriors, outlaws, wild men – it's also an affectionate comedy about people living in their own folklore. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Thierry Lounas
Screenplay
Jean-Charles Hue
Cinematographer
Jonathan Ricquebourg
Editor
Isabelle Proust

Art Director
Christophe Simonnet
Original Music
Vincent-Marie Bouvot
Sound Recordist
Antoine Bailly

@Capricci
Production

Companies
With the participation of Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Ciné+ With the support of Ciclic-Région in partnership with CNC and Arte/Cofinova 10

Capricci presents

Cast
Frédéric Dorkel
Fred Dorkel
Jason François
Jason Dorkel
Mickaël Dauber

Mickaël Dorkel
Moïse Dorkel
Moïse Dorkel

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor

Capricci Films

French theatrical title
Mange tes morts
Tu ne diras point

Normandy, France, present day. Jason Dorkel, an 18-year-old Yéniche, lives in a trailer park with his mother and older brother Mickaël, and spends his days hunting wild game on a dirt-bike with his cousin Moïse. The day before Jason's planned baptism, the Dorkels get an unexpected visit from Jason's eldest brother Fred, just out of jail after a 15-year stint for killing a police officer. That night, Mickaël surprises Fred, revealing that he has kept his BMW Alpina in a garage for him, ready for his return. While Jason, Mickaël, Fred and Moïse are out drinking, Jason mentions that he knows the location of a large truckload of copper, and Fred hatches a scheme to steal it. They set out in

the Alpina; Fred plans to start the night at Colette's, a bar and brothel, but he can no longer find it. While siphoning gas from a car in a parking lot, the gang become involved in a violent scuffle from which they barely escape. Finally they arrive at the scrapyard where the copper is stored, and Jason and Mickaël start hotwiring the truck containing it. They are caught by a guard dog, which mauls Mickaël's arm; in the ensuing panic, Fred runs over one of the men at the scrapyard, a friend of Jason's. The police pursue the gang; Fred leads them to safety before striking off on his own.

The following day, Jason is baptised; he prays for Jesus to be revealed to Fred.

A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night

USA 2014

Director: Ana Lily Amirpour

Certificate 15 100m 47s

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

In Ana Lily Amirpour's debut feature *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*, the Girl (Sheila Vand) doesn't just walk: sometimes she stands more still than humanly possible; sometimes she mimics an old man's faltering steps; sometimes she takes off her chador and dances in her flat; sometimes she tears men's throats out; and sometimes she skateboards. Conveying both human traits and vampiric otherness, Vand's dancery movements make perfect sense of Amirpour's decision to shoot in anamorphic black and white: she is a creature from and of another time. Her movement across the wide screen, slowly sliding along the wall of a once grand building on her skateboard, even seems to still time.

She doesn't just defy the clichéd consequences implied by the title through her powerful actions as a vampire; she also fills the frame with her implacable poise and depthless gaze. Appearing first as a silhouette in a full chador, she stands near a road-crossing sign invented by Amirpour as a visual joke, warning drivers to look out for chador-clad women. Once again, the meaning is reversed: walking home alone and wearing the veil are here not markers of vulnerability and lack of agency, but of occult power. Unlike the Girl (Veronica Lake) of Preston Sturges's *Sullivan's Travels* (1941), Amirpour's Girl is not sidekick but superhero, an avenging angel whose first words in the film, spoken to a kid with a skateboard (which she takes), are "Are you a good boy?" Amoral but not immoral, the Girl kills local pimp Saeed (Dominic Rains) after he tries to hit on her, and later the old man Hossein (Marshall Manesh), after he forces Atti (Mozhan Marnò), one of Saeed's sex workers, to shoot up with him.

At a Q&A at the BFI London Film Festival last October, Amirpour said that she wrote the film for Vand after the latter made an off-the-cuff comment that someone should cast her as a vampire. Although the film offers us a human male, Arash ("the Persian James Dean" in Amirpour's words), as our apparent point-of-view character, it is the Girl who compels us through the desultory story and highly atmospheric world of Bad City, an Iranian town created in the California interior. Amirpour and her cast are part of the global Iranian diaspora, and the film has hints of homage to Iranian New Wave cinema, particularly in the knowing kid who drops his skateboard and later witnesses a fatal event.

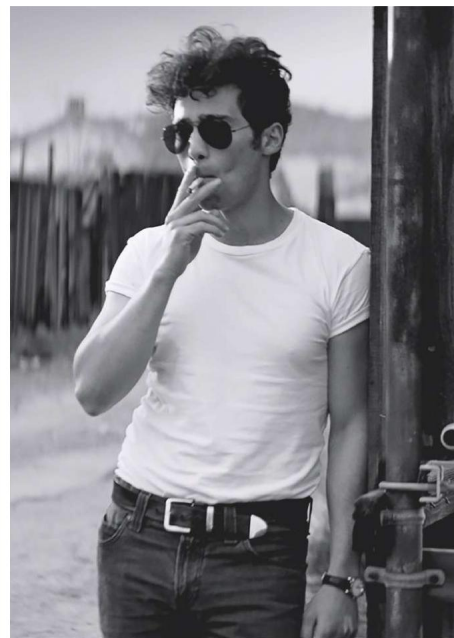
As many critics have noted, the film pays more obvious homage to the early work of Jim Jarmusch, as if sending the vampires of *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013) back to the more marginal social worlds depicted in his Nicholas Ray/Sam Fuller-influenced *Down by Law* (1986). There's a hint too of Gus Van Sant's gritty, whacked-out *Mala Noche* (1986), his 'bad night' suggesting Amirpour's Bad City. Unlike the work of these previous generations, however, Amirpour's film has the crispness and finesse of a music video. Every gesture is choreographed, every frame is arresting, every sound edit perfectly placed. When it works – as in the long sequence from the meet cute between the Girl and a very stoned Arash, which makes great use of the tendency of the



Avenging angel: Sheila Vand as the Girl, a vampire haunting the atmospheric world of Bad City

anamorphic lens to flare, or the moment when he approaches her in her apartment and time once again seems to slow down – this considered pace is arresting, but what works in moments of intensity can pall across the narrative arc.

The Girl-meets-boy narrative is foregrounded at the cost of more intriguing cameo characters: Arash Marandi has presence, but playing wounded hero Arash allows him none of the scope afforded to Rains, who gives an electric performance as Saeed. His preening, shirtless, iron-pumping attempt to seduce the Girl chimes with the observational sex comedy of that other film debut by an Iranian-American female filmmaker this year, Desiree Akhavan's *Appropriate Behaviour*. At this point the film also seems set for a showdown between the Girl and Shaydah (Rome Shadanloo), a bored rich kid whose family employs Arash as a handyman and who flirts with and then abandons him at a party – but soon this intriguing, well-drawn character drops out. Reza Sixo Safai's character, the Rockabilly (combining a hijab with a fringed shirt and tight jeans to work the streets), is a welcome note of intrigue and randomness in a tightly controlled



The 'Persian James Dean': Arash Marandi as Arash



closing scene with a direct gaze to camera. Cats' colour vision, while not strictly monochromatic, is far less vibrant than humans' and, as hunters, their ethics may hew closer to the Girl's than to that of people like the commentator Hossein sees on television, telling wives how to behave. Repeated extreme close-ups of the cat's eyes bear out this sense of a cool, amoral feline worldview controlling the film, one that is frequently paralleled with the vampire's: it's notable that the Girl executes Saeed and Hossein, both of whom have been cruel to the cat. Cats are notoriously difficult to direct, and it's Masuka the cat's wayward and spontaneous performance that brings to the film some of the raw, vivid and slyly funny quality of Jarmusch or Van Sant's more improvisational work.

But Masuka is not the only unpredictable, living element that enables the film to overcome the risk of glossy inertia: the atmospheric sound design by Jay Nierenberg is suggestive of the supernatural hearing of the vampire, as every inhalation of a cigarette crackles; the constant offscreen rumble of the trains that carry oil from the derricks of Bad City suggest at once the repetitive boredom of daily life and the possibility of a way out.

That comes through music: Amirpour, a singer and DJ, uses the soundtrack throughout with such verve and rhythm that the film moves towards being a musical. Arash's CDs are the first things he packs when leaving town for ever, and the Girl seems taken with him solely because he responds to her love of music. With a DJ's ear for a drop, Amirpour has the Girl tilt back Arash's head, exposing his neck, to the lyric (from 'Death' by White Lies): "I can feel my heart beating as I speed from/The sense of time catching up with me." She places her ear against his chest, listening for the beat of life that music brings to this relentlessly elegant vampire's-eye view of a film. **S**

The film has the crispness and finesse of a music video. Every gesture is choreographed, every frame is arresting

film, but his balloon dance – a homage to the dancing oddballs of David Lynch's work – is so dislocated as to be almost an extradiegetic insert.

Beneath its polish and *nouvelle vague*-saluting cool (the Girl sports a Breton striped top), the film can sometimes seem to lack a beating heart: shot in black and white, it has to omit the shocking red that was such a potent contrast with white snow in Tomas Alfredson's *Let the Right One In* (2008). When the Girl bites off Saeed's finger and uses it to paint blood like lipstick on his lips, the monochrome allows the moment to come across as witty – but ironic rather than angry in its critique of gendered violence. It only seems plausible that Arash would subsequently walk straight past the Girl despite the bloodstains around her mouth if they actually lived in a black-and-white world in which no shade registers. This certainly tallies with the ennui and the empty streets, and the total lack of attention given to the roadside gully full of dozens of dead bodies that is the Girl's dumping ground.

Or perhaps it's an indication of the film's true point-of-view character: the cat that Arash steals in the opening scene, and which steals the

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Sina Sayyah
Justin Begnaud
Written by
Ana Lily Amirpour
Director of Photography
Lyle Vincent
Edited by
Alex O'Flinn
Production Design
Sergio De La Vega
Sound Designer

Jay Nierenberg
Costume Designer
Natalie O'Brien

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Production Companies
SpectreVision
presents in
association with
Logan Pictures and
Black Light District a

Say Ahh production
A film by Ana
Lily Amirpour
Supported by a grant
from the Sundance
Institute Feature
Film Program Fund
Executive Producers
Daniel Noah
Josh C. Waller
Elijah Wood
Ben Conrad
Nick Mocerri

Alexei Tylevich
Daniel Grove
Patrick Grove
Reza Sixio Safai

Cast
Sheila Vand
the girl
Arash Marandi
Arash
Mozhan Marnò
Atti, prostitute

Marshall Manesh
Hossein, junkie
Dominic Rains
Saeed, pimp
Milad Eghbali
street urchin
Rome Shadanloo
Shaydah, 'the princess'
Reza Sixo Safai
Rockbilly
Masuka
cat

Black and White
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

An Iranian town named Bad City, the present. Arash, taking a break from looking after his heroin-addicted father Hossein, steals a cat. Local dealer/pimp Saeed takes Arash's prized classic car in payment for his father's debts, and uses it to meet with Atti, a sex worker. While she is performing oral sex on him, he sees the Girl, draped in a black chador, watching. The Girl follows Saeed home and kills him with a bite to the neck when he tries to touch her. She steals his Rolex watch and other jewellery; Arash, arriving after she has left, reclaims his car keys and takes the dealer's stash, which he sells at a costume party he's heard about from a rich girl he worked for. High on ecstasy and turned down

by the rich girl, Arash meets the Girl in the street and spends the night listening to music in her apartment after she pushes him home on a skateboard that she's stolen from a small boy. On a subsequent date, she accepts his gift of earrings (stolen from the rich girl), then walks away. Despondent, Arash kicks out his father, giving him the remains of the dealer's stash and money (and also the cat), which Hossein takes to Atti. When Hossein forces Atti to shoot up, the Girl arrives and kills him; the boy sees the Girl and Atti dump the body. Although Arash suspects the Girl – who now has the cat – of killing his father, he asks her to leave town with him, and they drive into the night.



Man behaving badly: Elizabeth Moss as Ashley and Jason Schwartzman as Philip Lewis Friedman

Listen Up Philip

USA/Greece 2014

Director: Alex Ross Perry

Certificate 15 109m 17s

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Movies about writers have always borne a vexing handicap – relative to artists, sculptors, composers or even filmmakers, whose processes we can find addictive to watch, writers do their work in the monastic privacy of their own skulls. As countless cyber-thrillers have demonstrated, there are few things more enervating than watching someone type. Luckily, our cultural tangle with writers, as individuals weaving ageless narratives or poetic legacies out of perfectly thin air, can often have the grist of very bad – or at least socially irresponsible – behaviour to contend with. As semi-public figures, writers grip our imaginations precisely because their craft commonly insists they fly against the demands that most of us have to deal with – ordinary day-swallowing wage-slavery, social modesty, public self-control, responsibility to others, self-sacrifice within relationships.

Alex Ross Perry's *Listen Up Philip* grabs this dynamic with two jittery hands and limns a

pocket-sized portrait of nascent literary solipsism gone almost irredeemably toxic. The film can be men-behaving-badly hilarious, because its many stone-cold embarrassments are deftly lifted from the realities of small-pond-mean-fish ambition in the increasingly lean world of contemporary literary fiction. Devising the character of Philip Lewis Friedman (Jason Schwartzman), Perry has indexed the living legend of novelist Philip Roth, and in a particularly interesting way – imagining, in a sense, how Roth's famously egomaniacal, womanising, bulldozing personality would fare in the 21st century, when writing slim, sophisticated, self-referential novels could no longer dependably buy you mainstream ubiquity, a nation of fans and a house in the Hamptons.

Having recently turned 30, Perry is also taking sniper aim at modern hipsterdom in its Brooklyn details, but Philip Friedman is an incendiary gag that you would suppose probably universalises all the way back to H.L. Mencken and William Faulkner. (The film's and the character's implicit nostalgia is for the post-war American-lit landscape embodied by Roth, Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, John Updike, Joseph Heller etc.) Unblinking, machine-gun-mouthed and catastrophically self-excusing, Philip is by all indications of the story a truly

talented writer – his acclaimed if underselling first novel is followed now by the release of his second, of which no one in the film utters a single word of doubt or criticism. But Philip himself is a monster, a world-beating dick. As he moves into caustic-celebration mode, expecting his new book to confirm his greatness to the world, everyone gets the quick-tongued jerk's self-aggrandising vitriol sprayed in their face like clown seltzer, from his sweet and therefore doomed live-in girlfriend Ashley (Elisabeth Moss) to his few remaining friends (a confrontational bar meeting with an old classmate reduces the man to tears) and even his long-suffering agent (Daniel London), who balks when Philip decides whimsically that he won't help publicise his own book and begins a meeting with Philip by telling his assistant, "Don't hold my calls."

Philip's respect is reserved only for Ike Zimmerman (Jonathan Pryce), an old-guard lit giant roughly rhyming with Roth himself (his novels are wittily titled and designed as faux Roths from the apex of the paperback era), who extends a mandarin invitation to meet after being impressed by Philip's book. It's a rich conceit – two Philips, suggesting a prismatic view of poisonous ego plus or minus the fermentation of time. Full of malted aphorisms and grizzled advice, Pryce's courtly



Machine-gun-mouthed Philip is by all indications a truly talented writer. But he is also a monster, a world-beating dick

king is just as narcissistic as Philip, a fact we only come to see gradually, as we are made aware of his ruinous history of marriages and fatherhood. It's Zimmerman's offhand offer to Philip of his upstate country house as a quiet sanctuary to write that precipitates the collapse of Philip's relationship with Ashley and his eventual comeuppance, as a man with nothing but burnt-out bridges.

Shot with a handheld looseness that often verges on attention deficit and structured with a heavy-hand narration that could be, perhaps, the text of a Philip book-to-be, *Listen Up Philip* wheels free, detouring in its second half towards Ashley's tear-stained recovery from Philip-ness, Zimmerman's crumbling relationship with his suspicious grown daughter (Krysten Ritter) and Philip's own unhappy attempt to earn a living as a creative-writing teacher. This is Perry's third feature, and his narrative strategies can be whimsical. His first film, *Impolex* (2009), was a tiny experiment shot entirely in the Vermont woods, in which a WWII-suited hero searched aimlessly for toy V-2 rockets, chatted with a (very real) octopus draped over a log, messed around with a handmade tarot deck and so on, in what you gradually realised was something like a microscope-slide adaptation of Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. Less reverse-grandiose, his sophomore feature *The Color Wheel* (2011) was reportedly inspired by Roth's fiction, and more closely adhered to orthodox indie iconography by accompanying a bellicose brother and sister on a meandering, very verbal black-and-white road trip to lost adulthood. The new film moves in the kilter of a mid-career Woody Allen, weaving but not quite cohering, taking leave of hate-magnet Philip only at its peril. As Ashley, Moss is warm and responsive, but her character's reconstitution of a Philip-free life is also drama-free.

Happily stuck in a literary era from before he was born, Perry never seems starry-eyed – *Listen Up Philip* may be the most lucid film ever made about the modern fiction publishing industry, not that it has much competition. But I never thought I'd see a movie that's more cynical about the American lit scene than I am. In fact, as Philip's stone-faced dress-downs and vain exclamations pile up, the extremeness of his personality creates a real-world disconnect – it's very difficult to parse out exactly why most of the eye-rolling characters revile him as an abhorrent asswipe, and why others, mostly women, find him adorable, or at least do not seem to understand his repugnance, à la Margaret Dumont in the

Marx Brothers' movies. Are we meant to take the film's social whorl as nominally realistic or believable? Or does Perry have an unaddressed issue with women? In reality, after all, distasteful male egomaniacs attract women all the time – but maybe, behind closed doors, they're not assholes 100 per cent of the time, as Philip is.

The disconnect may be built in: Philip himself lacks even a child's acumen on how to dress up his narcissism for company, and Perry is applying a cold eye and a broad brush to the inherent and necessary selfishness required for novelists to prioritise their imaginary narratives. Which reveals another, almost inevitable vacuum in Perry's admittedly modest film – outside of the reams of talk about writing and its demands, there's no access to the writing itself, Philip's or Zimmerman's or anyone's. There may be no graceful way to do it, but avoiding the work means that the movie buys into exactly the kind of thinking Perry is lampooning – that writers are Writers, living certain kinds of lives ruled by privilege, self-indulgence and creative impulse, and that these lives are what matters most. They're not just sentence-makers but demigods in tweed, blessed with loftier ambitions than the rest of us, and less rigorous morality, and are free to be pigs in the process.

Without a taste of the writing itself – of how Philip manages to achieve beauty or greatness despite himself – Perry's film ends up feeling one-sided and thin, a deft riff on a New Yorker stereotype that doesn't dare to scratch the surface. It's Philip who did the work, and if that work is any good, it has to harbour at least a few molecules of generosity and empathic insight. Where's that guy? 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Katie Stern
Joshua Blum
James M. Johnston
Toby Halbrooks
David Lowery
Written by
Alex Ross Perry
Director of Photography
Sean Price Williams
Editor
Robert Greene
Production Designer
Scott Kuzio
Original Score
Keegan DeWitt
Sound Mixer
Clayton Castellanos
Costume Designer
Amanda Ford

©Listen Up
Philip, LLC
Production Companies
Tribeca Film and
Faliero House

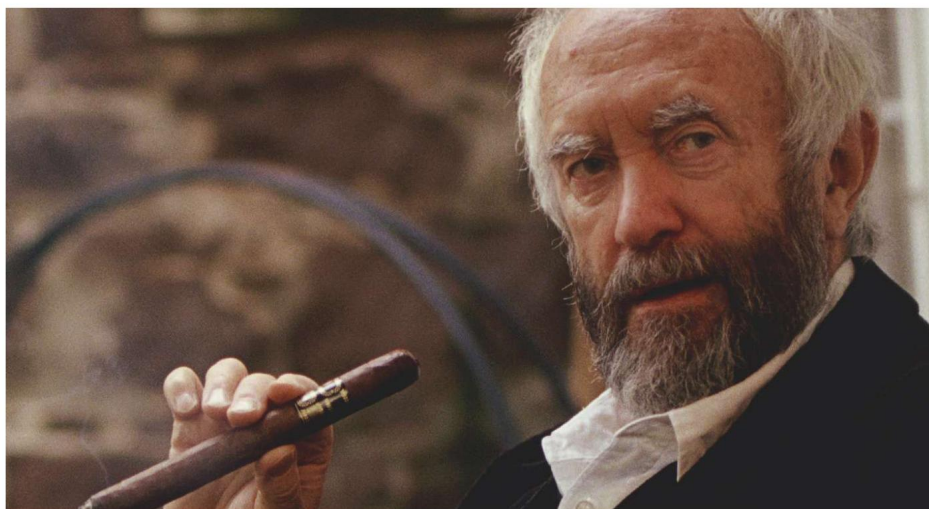
Productions present
a Sailor Bear and
Washington Square
Films production
Filmed with the
support of the
New York State
Governor's Office
for Motion Picture
& Television
Development
Executive Producer
Christos V.
Konstantakopoulos

Cast
Jason Schwartzman
Philip Lewis
Friedman
Elisabeth Moss
Ashley Kane
Krysten Ritter
Melanie Zimmerman
Joséphine de la Baume
Yvette Dussart
Jonathan Pryce

Ike Zimmerman
Daniel London
Seth, Philip's agent

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Eureka
Entertainment



Man of letters: Jonathan Pryce as novelist Ike Zimmerman

Philip Lewis Friedman is a young New York novelist about to publish his second book. He is, he thinks, on the cusp of fame and greatness. Philip is abusive and egocentric, and he alienates almost everyone around him, though his toxic personality attracts women. Philip becomes friends with Ike Zimmerman, a great novelist from the previous generation, and spends the summer at Ike's country house, leaving his girlfriend Ashley behind in the city. Life slowly spirals out of control as Ashley adjusts to a life without Philip, who soon finds himself teaching creative writing and without a place to live. As the season of his supposed great success comes and goes, Philip finds himself alone, homeless and forgotten in New York.



Immaculate conception: Nadine Marshall as Jackie, an ordinary woman who finds herself inexplicably pregnant in Debbie Tucker Green's debut feature

Second Coming

United Kingdom/USA 2014

Director: Debbie Tucker Green

See Interview
on page 11

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

Like Pieter Bruegel or Stanley Spencer, writer-director Debbie Tucker Green is interested in how moments of transcendence are knitted into the humdrum daily routines of life. For those painters, it was the fall of Icarus or the Resurrection that needed to be brought into urgent proximity to the everyday. In Tucker Green's *Second Coming* it is conception and childbirth – everyday occurrences for humanity – that are revealed as mysterious and inexorable interventions into individual lives. And so we discover that an ordinary woman called Jackie (Nadine Marshall) is pregnant: a dubious miracle, since she cannot or will not explain how she conceived a child without having sex with her husband or anyone else. Tracking the unwelcome pregnancy through its three trimesters, Tucker Green persists in withholding this one piece of information: every other detail of Jackie's life is laid bare, but she will not say a word to her loving husband Mark (Idris Elba) or even her best friend Bernie (Sharlene Whyte) about the provenance of

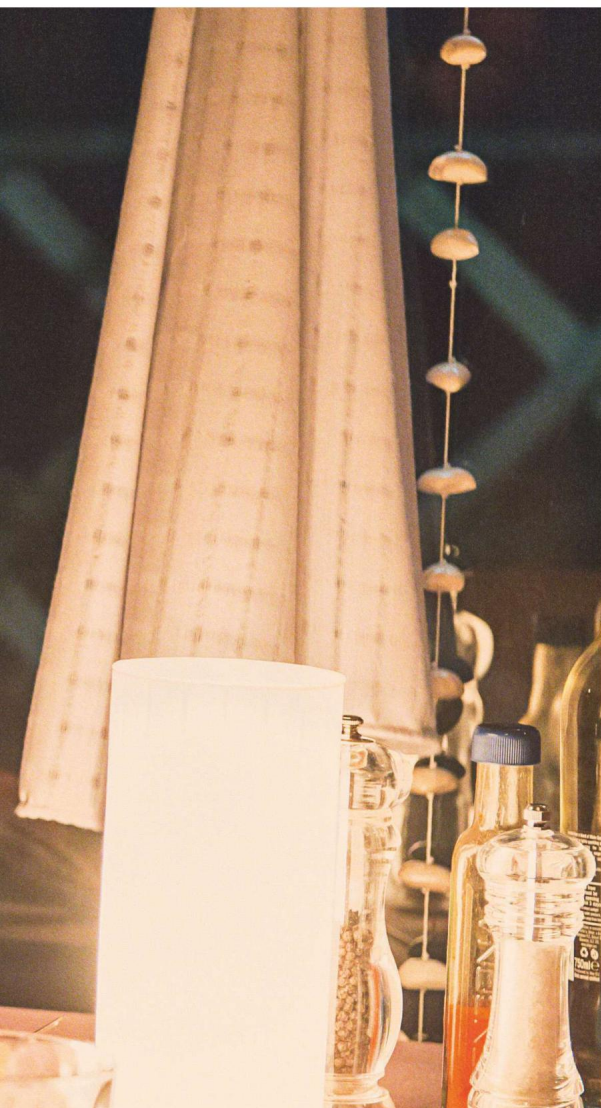
her unborn child. Is her silence a protest? A provocation? Some kind of mental illness?

Although the film's title and some of its themes suggest a Christian interpretation, Tucker Green is determined to disallow any certainty about what exactly is going on: divine intervention is suggested, but it is just as plausible, for instance, that there is a psychological explanation for Jackie's silence, that she is repressing an unthinkable memory. Certainly, she is not given the option of a visit by an angelic tutor who can walk her through the nitty-gritty of immaculate conception; instead, she gets hallucinations – visions, as she calls them – of being drenched by a deluge of water that pours into the private space of her bathroom, the one place where she is alone. It is enough, Tucker Green seems to say, to know that the inexplicable exists, and acts on our lives with relentless indifference. Don't ask more.

This approach demands a lot from the audience: it is radically at odds with our insatiable hunger for the satisfying clunk of narrative closure, not just in fiction but in our own self-told stories. Yet as the film progresses, Jackie's silence becomes essential: it is what the film is about. Scandalous, inconvenient or uncanny, pregnancy is one of the eternal plots, playing out in melodramas, sentimental comedies and horror films alike, but in most cases the woman is the active and voluble focus of discussion and debate. Female characters in

this position are not supposed to be inscrutable: they are supposed to produce torrents of communication and emotional availability. For Jackie – though she is happy enough to banter with her husband and bitch at her sister – the incontrovertible, physical fact of her pregnancy must remain a discursive dead end.

Such total reticence contrasts with Tucker Green's impressive talent for punchy, eloquent dialogue. She knows how to use the terse abbreviations of Afro-Caribbean London slang to maximum effect: in one brief exchange between Jackie and Mark, as she is leaving for work, he answers her brusque "I'm gone" with a simple "From time": perfectly summing up her strained withdrawal, and his sorrow and resentment, in four economical syllables. This spare style of writing is essential to the film's deft manipulation of depth and surface: focused tightly on the minutiae of Jackie's life – cooking, eating, working, sleeping – Tucker Green shows how these details resonate with emotional vibrations far below the surface, so that when we see slight variations in Jackie's routines we can read in them her state of mind. With words deployed so sparingly, much is conveyed visually: in the hands of director of photography Ula Pontikos, the camera is an intimate and at times intrusive presence, especially in the cluttered interiors of Jackie and Mark's house, where much of the action takes place. Its gaze can be



It is enough, Debbie Tucker Green seems to say, to know that the inexplicable exists, and acts on our lives with relentless indifference. Don't ask more

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Polly Leys
Kate Norrish
Written by
Debbie Tucker Green
Director of Photography
Ula Pontikos
Editor
Mark Eckersley

Production Designer
Lisa Marie Hall
Composer
Luke Sutherland
Production Sound Mixer
Kieron Wolfson
Costume Designer
Edward K. Gibbon

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Production Companies
Film4 and BFI present a Hillbilly Films production

Supported by the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program
Developed with the assistance of Film4
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producer
Katherine Butler

Cast
Nadine Marshall
Jackie
Idris Elba
Mark
Kai Francis-Lewis
JJ
Sharlene Whyte
Bernie

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Kaleidoscope Film Distribution

London, present day. Jackie, Mark and their 11-year-old son JJ are a happy family living comfortably in the suburbs. But Jackie is worried: she has discovered that she is pregnant, and since she and her husband haven't had sex recently, it's hard to explain how. She confides to best friend Bernie that she is contemplating an abortion but doesn't explain why; nor does she explain why she eventually decides to go through with the pregnancy. Meanwhile JJ is forced to confront the reality of death when a wild crow he has tamed is accidentally hurt. He brings it home to nurse it but it dies and he buries it in the garden.

As the weeks and months go by, Mark and JJ



Scenes from a marriage: Jackie with her husband Mark, played by Idris Elba

almost unbearably insistent; when it fixes on their shy and dreamy son JJ (Kai Francis-Lewis) as he is forced to witness his father – out of shot – furiously haranguing Jackie for several minutes, the audience feels skewered along with him.

The film's ability to carry off such subtlety depends very much on the quality of its actors, and Tucker Green has certainly hit gold with her cast. Marshall – who has worked before with the director and was nominated for a Bafta for the television adaptation of her play *Random* – is a talent to be reckoned with, bringing frozen despair and gulping vulnerability to a character who might otherwise have remained frustratingly enigmatic. Elba, meanwhile, cements his reputation as one of the most watchable actors of his generation, playing Mark with an unsettling combination of puppy-dog charm and tortured self-control, never upsetting the fine balance required to make the relationship plausible but carefully unspooling his character's supply of sympathy and patience until he reaches the end of his emotional rope.

Francis-Lewis makes a striking debut too: though young, he approaches his role with

the intelligence and self-possession of a born actor. And he is crucial: the presence of JJ as an innocent witness is one of the masterstrokes of the film. He observes his mother's pregnancy with an astute wariness: we gradually realise that he has spent 11 years as the beloved only child who appeared – a miracle in himself – after several traumatic miscarriages; the new baby is a 'second coming' in this sense too. The couple's difficulty in having children is one of the motifs that the film reiterates in different keys, and indeed it helps to raise various questions about the way women are defined by their reproductive status. Jackie is permitted no privacy as she suffers her body's mutinous attack – her growing belly will overrule her, will speak for her, in the end. Her increasingly desperate attempts to regain control only result in her waging war on herself: the pregnancy is both something she is doing, and something that is being done to her, and when she rejects her own capacity for motherhood it is JJ, even more than Mark, who absorbs the emotional damage.

JJ's status as the moral centre of the piece seems to creep up on the film, since he is rarely its primary focus. He is a marginal presence, and confronts the adult world only tentatively, preferring to retreat into the natural landscape of a nearby common, where he patiently befriends a wild crow by feeding it little pieces of bread. These sequences are a lush, green counterpoint to the bustling, cosy house and the strip-lit beige interiors of Jackie's workplace, and provide a refreshingly legible representation of JJ's inner life – which serves to emphasise again Jackie's steadfast refusal to reveal her own. The featherlight subplot concerning JJ's bird is so quietly introduced that it's easy to miss its significance until the film's ambiguous but uplifting conclusion.

In the end, what had seemed a perverse refusal on the part of Tucker Green to deliver the key revelation becomes an invitation to let go of the expectation of total meaning and perfect comprehensibility delivered by an omniscient creator. Instead, *Second Coming* asks us to notice a more modest miracle emerging from the chaos and uncertainty of the everyday. **S**

The Beat Beneath My Feet

United Kingdom 2014
Director: John Williams
Certificate 15 91m 28s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

With all the will in the world, this modest British offering – heavy on wish-fulfilment, light on credibility – struggles to convince.

The precise mechanics of how Luke Perry's former US rock god is now managing to claim disability benefits under an assumed name in South London are perhaps left deliberately fuzzy, but even less believable is otherwise likeable lead Nicholas Galitzine's stultifyingly swift transformation from a tongue-tied nerd who can barely strum a couple of chords to a confident showstopper with a professional line in MOR song craft. Along the way, director John Williams displays his creative promise with a string of pop-video-style set pieces using stop-frame animation and CGI fantasy in song performances presumably intended to illustrate the seemingly reserved protagonist's bustling inner world. The enterprise of these scenes sticks out like a sore thumb, leading to a sense of what-might-have-been had the same degree of imagination and application gone into the rest of Williams's otherwise dramatically lukewarm offering. **S**



Bodily harmony: Nicholas Galitzine, Verity Pinter

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Fiona Gillies
Michael Mueller
Raj Sharma
Written by
Michael Mueller
Director of Photography
Sara Deane
Editor
Thomas Goldser
Production Design
Alison Butler
Music
Paul Cartledge
Geoff Jackson
Philip Jewson

Production Sound
Nigel Albermarliche
Costume Design
Cécile van Dijk

©The Beat Beneath
My Feet Ltd
Production Company
Scoop Films
presents

Cast
Luke Perry
Max Stone, 'Steve'
Lisa Dillon

Mary
Nicholas Galitzine
Tom
Verity Pinter
Felix
Simon Lowe
Jonah
James Tarpey
Damien
Eleanor Herdman
Alice

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Scoop Films

South London suburbia, present day. Gawky teenager Tom lives with his single mother Mary, who's divorcing her estranged musician husband. Tom, who keeps his own musical activities secret from Mary, realises that their new neighbour 'Steve' is in fact Max Stone, a former rock star missing for years and wanted for tax evasion. Tom threatens to reveal that Max is living on disability benefits unless the latter teaches him songwriting skills and helps him perform at a local Battle of the Bands contest. But their deal is off when an angry Mary discovers the pair rehearsing on the roof; Max decides to leave. With the encouragement of his female classmate Felix, Tom takes the stage at the Battle of the Bands. Mary finally recognises his talent. Max, ready to come to terms with his past, joins in the triumphant performance. He subsequently spends time in jail but later performs in concert with Tom.

Big Game

Finland/United Kingdom/Germany/France 2014
Director: Jalmari Helander
Certificate 12A 90m 23s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Jalmari Helander's follow-up to 2010's *Rare Exports* is one of those weird combination pitches satirised in *The Player* – *Air Force One* meets *Walkabout*. It even feels a little like the actual joke pitch from *The Player*, which is *The Gods Must Be Crazy* but with Goldie Hawn as the Coke bottle.

The opening scenes are set in a subtitled far north of Finland, and have the sad-eyed, chipmunk-toothed Onni Tommila as Oskari, teenage son of legendary hunter Tapio (played by Onni's real-life father Jorma Tommila), grizzled and bearded and sporting a regulation ratty jumper. Oskari and Tapio might be related to Pietari and Rauno, the Tommilas' characters in *Rare Exports*. In the earlier film, the boy was responsible and the father childish, but the dynamic has been reversed here: Oskari, who on his 13th birthday must complete a manhood ritual to prove his prowess as a hunter, can't even fire an arrow more than a few feet, whereas at the same age his father famously killed a bear. The most affecting moment comes when Oskari follows a map that his father has given to him, which will supposedly lead him to big game, only to find a rusty freezer cabinet hooked up to a chugging generator, containing the severed head of a deer – the birthday gift of a father who has no faith in his son. There's wryness and melancholy in equal measure, and even a sense of the lasting savagery of a culture that's built around killing animals and that has no place for a more sensitive lad.

Then, slicing through ominous action-movie clouds in *Air Force One*, comes Samuel L. Jackson as a lame-duck US president who, like Oskari, is so distrusted by those around him that they feel they have to cheat to make him do his job – in this case, by torturing him to death on camera to keep the flagging War on Terror going. When his plane comes under attack, the president makes an emergency exit, landing in the Finnish forest below. Jackson, as much an alien here as Goldie Hawn would be in an African wilderness, arrives in an escape pod like the one in John Carpenter's

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Will Clarke
Andy Mayson
Jens Meurer
Produced by
Petri Jokiranta
Screenplay
Jalmari Helander
Based on the original story by Jalmari Helander and Petri Jokiranta
Director of Photography
Mika Orasmaa
Editing
Ilkka Hesse

Production Design
Christian Eisele
Music
Juri Seppä
Miska Seppä
Sound Design
Timo Anttila
Tuomas Seppänen
Costume Design
Mo Vorwerk
Stunt Co-ordinators
Torsten Jerabek
Marc Sieger

©Subzero Film
Entertainment,
Altitude Film

Entertainment,
Egoli Tossell Film
Production Companies
Europacorp presents a Subzero Film
Entertainment, Altitude
Entertainment, Egoli Tossell Film
co-production in association with VisionPlus Fund I, Ketchup/Waterstone, Head Gear Films and Metrol Technology, Film House Germany.

Bavaria Film Partners
A Jalmari Helander film
Executive Producers
Jari Tuovinen
Phil Hunt
Compton Ross
Alex Garland
Mike Runagall
Water Donaghue
Christian Angermayer
Alan Howard
Benjamin Melkman
Marc Hansell
Yarin Quereshi
Markus R. Vogelbacher

Cast
Samuel L. Jackson
President of the United States
Onni Tommila
Oskari
Ray Stevenson
Morris
Victor Garber
Vice-president of the United States
Mehmet Kurtulus
Hazar
Ted Levine
General Underwood
Felicity Huffman
CIA director

Jim Broadbent
Herbert
Jorma Tommila
Tapio
Risto Salmi
Hamara

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
E1 Films

Finland, the present. Oskari sets out to spend a night in the woods on his 13th birthday, as part of a manhood ritual that requires him to prove his prowess as a hunter – though he worries that he won't live up to his father's expectations. US president William Moore is ejected from *Air Force One* when it is attacked by ground-to-air missiles, and he falls into the woods, where Oskari finds him. Morris, Moore's bodyguard, and Hazar, a supposed psychopath, are part of a conspiracy to capture, torture



Running mate: Onni Tommila, Samuel L. Jackson

Escape from New York (1981), which Oskari at first takes for a space capsule, demanding, "What planet are you from?" When apprised of the importance of Jackson's President Moore, Oskari assumes that he in turn must have heard of his father. It's another tiny telling moment in a film that is otherwise too often distracted by pretending to be an entry in the *Air Force One/White House Down/Olympus Has Fallen* cycle, in which a stalwart lone hero teams up with an imperilled prez to see off unlikely conspiracy plots involving caricature foreign baddies and gnarled US character-actor conspirators.

Jackson gamely lets young Tommila steal scenes from him but is too vivid a presence to be a simple trophy. Like Donald Pleasence's president in *Escape from New York*, Moore is mostly useless in the wild and suffers through a series of undignified perils, though he gets to use a submachine gun to riddle his tormentor with bullets. Jackson's righteously angry screen persona is briefly unleashed, with a family-friendly modification as the loud rattle of the machine gun covers up the second half of the actor's signature insult.

The seesawing between Finnish sad-sack comedy and Hollywood action schlock and between children's adventure and bloodier *Die Hard*-in-a-forest business makes for an inconsistent but mostly entertaining picture. **S**

and kill the president – though this turns out to be a plot by the vice president and shadowy interests to justify anti-terrorist actions. Oskari helps Moore to survive in the wilderness, rescues him from capture and thwarts the conspirators. Hazar and Morris are killed while trying to murder the president; the vice president is killed by the seeming mastermind of the plan. Required to bring home big game to complete the ritual, Oskari presents the US president as his catch.

The Canal

Ireland/The Netherlands/United Kingdom 2014
Director: Ivan Kavanagh

Reviewed by Michael Pattison

When film archivist David (Rupert Evans) tries to engage an auditorium of children by asking which of them wants to see ghosts, Dublin-shot *The Canal* gives a good indication of what's to come. Just as James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) began with a friendly warning of terrors ahead, so writer-director Ivan Kavanagh is hinting at the horrors that will soon destroy our protagonist's domestic bliss. First comes the discovery that David's home, which he shares with his wife Alice (Hannah Hoekstra) and their five-year-old son Billy (Calum Heath), was the location of some grisly killings back in 1902. Soon afterwards, his wife's body is fished out of a nearby canal. The catch is that the earlier murders, David later learns, were carried out by a husband who suspected his wife of adultery – and on the night of her disappearance, Alice is seen by her husband in the fleshy transports of an affair. The two threads are linked: because his wife's lover is said to have a cast-iron alibi, David comes to believe that evil spirits are to blame.

Ghost stories are all about the suspension of disbelief – about seeing how far you can drag an audience along – and a large part of this has to do with atmosphere, which is itself dependent on a complex combination of factors: timing, texture, tone and so on. *The Canal*, appropriately enough, works this need for persuasion into its very conceit: in its opening scene, David loses the interest of his young audience when he reveals that the ghosts he's referring to are merely the now dead subjects of archive film (that his work isn't especially engaging is a repeated gag), and he spends the rest of his screen time struggling to convince fellow adults that demons really are responsible for his wife's death.

Chief among these sceptics is McNamara (Steve Oram), an openly accusatory and comically hateful police detective whose presence keeps the narrative tied to the tropes of a wrong-man thriller. Caught between prioritising eerie atmospherics and the demands of an explicable



Spirited away: Rupert Evans

murder mystery, however, Kavanagh and his team have a tough time holding things together. Their go-to techniques in sustaining our initial interest are those now routine sonic contrasts, presumably intended to keep the heart beating during scene-to-scene transitions even when other basics – namely, the character and lived-in feel of the protagonist's haunted home – haven't quite been realised. You can only shock-cut from a quiet reaction to a coat being loudly zipped so many times – and the belated introduction of a secondary character's romantic attraction to our protagonist suggests, perhaps, misguided priorities.

For his part at least, Oram seems to have recognised the shortcomings of Kavanagh's script. As a sleuth clearly not stretched by a prime suspect who's very obviously channelling personal bereavement through the fanciful frame of a paper-thin ghost story, the actor has a jolly time delivering his sniggers and allegations, and does so with the same gusto he brought to *Sightseers* – whose director, incidentally, knows how to make a horror tick. 📡

Child 44

USA 2014
Director: Daniel Espinosa
Certificate 15 137/m 0s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Throughout *Child 44*, an adaptation of Tom Rob Smith's bestselling novel, protagonist Leo Demidov has the Stalinist dictum that "there is no murder in paradise" drummed into his head – though people are casually killed as enemies of the state all around him. Loosely based on the story of prolific serial killer Andrei Chikatilo, already the subject of the excellent TV movie *Citizen X* (1995), this police procedural arises from an interesting premise... how would the Thought Police of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* cope with an actual criminal rather than an imaginary traitor? The policier arc of the book (which has sequels) is the relative progress from a monolithic tyranny incapable of delivering justice to a hypocritical yet pragmatic state that at least tries to catch its home-grown killers, even as it claims that they must have been warped by foreign ideology.

Richard Price's script takes a while to get to the business in hand. Prologues set in Ukraine in 1933 and Berlin in 1945 are necessary to fill in Demidov's complicated background as an orphan survivor of Stalin's genocide-by-starvation who has found a home in the Red Army as a conquering hero. Even after the first body has been found, the plot skitters away to cover the secret police's daily round of arrests, interrogations, tortures and summary executions, along with a tangled web of soap-opera relationships (Leo and fellow officers Alexei and Vasili are old comrades but they don't necessarily like each other) that are further complicated by the difficulties of having any kind of honest human interactions in a totalitarian state. The kicker for Leo is when he finds out that his much-told story about his meet-cute with his wife – that she gave him a false name and tried to avoid him because she thought him insincere – isn't true: she knew what his job was, and has always been terrified of him.

With an excellent multinational cast putting on their best Russian accents and looking drably oppressed, this is a fairly sluggish thriller – and the heavyweight insights into the oppressive nature of Stalinism are derailed slightly by typical melodrama contrivances. Tom Hardy's hero can take several beatings and still see off three determined hitmen, albeit with the aid of his tenacious wife (Noomi Rapace, flashing a little Lisbeth Salander as she knifes a

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Annemarie Naughton
Written by
Ivan Kavanagh
Director of Photography
Piers McGrail
Editor
Robin Hill
Production Designer
Stephanie Clerkin
Composer
Ceiri Torjussen
Sound Design
Aza Hand
Costume Designer
Judith Williams

Pictures & Gennaker Ltd in co-production with Western Edge Pictures
Supported by Bord Scannán na hÉireann/Irish Film Board with the Film Agency for Wales
Executive Producers
Rory Gilmartin
Rebecca O'Flanagan
Adam Partridge
Mike Rattenbury
Andrew Thomas
Rob Walpole

Billy Williams

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Kaleidoscope Film Distribution

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t/a Park Films Ltd
Production Companies
Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board with the Film Agency for Wales present a Park Films production in association with Treasure Entertainment, CTM

Cast

Rupert Evans
David Williams
Antonia Campbell Hughes
Claire
Hannah Hoekstra
Alice Williams
Kelly Byrne
Sophie
Steve Oram
McNamara
Calum Heath

Dublin, the present. Film archivist David Williams has been living in his house with his wife Alice and their young son Billy for half a decade when he discovers that it was the site of a murder in 1902. Accompanying Alice to a party, David begins to suspect that she is having an affair, and soon afterwards follows her to her lover's home, where he finds them having sex. Nauseous, he enters a state of delirium, during which he briefly sees Alice being beaten up by a man. Coming to, David realises that Alice hasn't returned home and informs the police that she is missing. When Alice's body is found in the canal, a coroner concludes that her death was accidental. Unsatisfied, David begins to investigate the 1902 murders and shoots his home's interiors with old film stock. Watching the developed footage, David sees a ghostly figure in one of the rooms. After filming a part of the canal where he thinks he saw a woman's ghost, David invites his colleague Claire to watch the footage with him. During the film, a demon emerges from behind a wall and murders Claire. David is pursued by police officers into the sewers, where he experiences flashbacks that reveal he killed Alice and Claire. David drowns. Later, his ghost asks Billy to join him and Alice. While being driven away by his grandmother, Billy opens the car door and steps out while it's still moving.



Russian winter: Tom Hardy, Gary Oldman

killer). In the final confrontation in the woods, there's a face-off between a Soviet cop and a mad serial killer that offers a précis of the argument of Fritz Lang's *M*, as the serial murderer claims he can't help waterboarding and dissecting little boys, whereas the secret policeman has had a choice about killing for the state. This is capped by the cowardly secret policeman turning up on his own rather than with the troop of goons he's had at hand throughout the picture; they then arrive a few minutes later when it's convenient for the story.

Swedish director Daniel Espinosa, who made an international name with *Easy Money* in 2010 before undertaking the conventional Denzel Washington vehicle *Safe House* in 2012, does a fair job of reworking the style of *The Silence of the Lambs* into a historical drama full of clanking steam trains, piles of snow in grim streets and the likes of Gary Oldman, Vincent Cassel and Charles Dance acting in uniform from behind desks. It's undeniably glum and takes a long time to get going – but eventually it does. **B**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Ridley Scott
Michael Schaeffer
Greg Shapiro
Screenplay by
Richard Price
Based upon the
novel by Tom
Rob Smith
**Director of
Photography**
Oliver Wood
Edited by
Pietro Scalia
Dylan Tichenor
**Production
Designer**
Jan Roelfs
Music
Jon Ekstrand
**Supervising Sound
Editor/Designer**
Per Hallberg
Costume Designer
Jenny Beaven

presents
in association
with Worldview
Entertainment
A Scott Free
production
A Daniel
Espinosa film
with the support of
the film production
incentives
of the Czech
Cinematography
Fund
**Executive
Producers**
Adam Merims
Elisha Holmes
Douglas Urbanski
Kevin Plank
Molly Connors
Maria Cestone
Sarah E. Johnson
Hoyt David Morgan

Cast
Tom Hardy
Leo Demidov
Gary Oldman
General Mikhail
Nesterov

Noomi Rapace
Raisa Demidov
Joel Kinnaman
Vasili
Paddy Considine
Vladimir Malevich
Jason Clarke
Anatoly Tarasovich
Brodsky
Vincent Cassel
Major Kuzmin

**Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]**

Distributor
El Films

©Summit
Entertainment, LLC.
**Production
Companies**
Summit
Entertainment

Moscow, 1953. When the young son of MGB (secret police) officer Alexei Andreyev is murdered, his friend and superior Leo Demidov is ordered to tell him that the boy died in an accident. Leo's wife Raisa is accused of treason – perhaps through the machinations of jealous subordinate Vasili. When Leo stands by her, he is reduced in rank and sent to the town of Volsk to serve as a militiaman under General Nesterov. A boy is found murdered in Volsk, in the same manner as Andreyev's son. Leo – stung by Raisa's revelation that she married him because she was afraid of turning down an MGB officer – prevails on Nesterov to investigate. After discovering many other deaths that have been written off as accidents, Nesterov is purged. Leo and Raisa evade hitmen sent by Vasili and track Vlad Malevich, the serial killer, to a factory in Rostov. Leo and Raisa confront the killer in the woods, but Vlad is killed by Vasili, who intends to murder the couple. Instead, they kill Vasili, and claim that he died trying to arrest Vlad.

Following the death of Stalin, Leo asks to be allowed to form a Moscow homicide investigation department.

Clouds of Sils Maria

France/Germany/Switzerland/USA/Italy 2014

Director: Olivier Assayas

Certificate 15 123 m 39s



Cloud actress: Juliette Binoche, Kristen Stewart



Reviewed by Violet Lucca

It's perhaps natural to become a little breathless when talking about *Clouds of Sils Maria*: is there really a film in which Juliette Binoche stars as a legendary actress who comes to terms with ageing and our current climate of clickbait scandal by extensively discussing the meaning of an imaginary play based on Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* with Kristen Stewart?

Playing with a variety of cinematic conventions, his own biography and those of his stars, director Olivier Assayas here works through Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence (that a finite number of events will repeat themselves infinitely over an infinite period of time) in an understandable,

unpretentious, spontaneous and funny way. Divided into three parts and an epilogue, the film departs from the dialectic – a structure that underpins the plot of most films, from Hollywood romcom and manchild comedy to Eisenstein's *oeuvre* – and instead traces its protagonist's difficult rejection of long-held beliefs and her coming to terms with an unending cycle, using formal elements that are ambiguously subjective.

Twenty years ago, Maria Enders (Binoche) made her name with her performance in a play called *Maloja Snake*; she was Sigrid, a bewitching young beauty who begins a manipulative affair with her married employer Helena. The older woman gives in to her every demand but kills herself when Sigrid abandons her. In Maria's view, Sigrid is young and strong while Helena is

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Charles Gillibert
Written by
Olivier Assayas
**Director of
Photography**
Yorick Le Saux
Editor
Marion Monnier
Production Designer
François-Renaud
Labarthe
Sound
Daniel Sobrino
Nicolas Moreau
Costume Designer
Jürgen Doering

©CG Cinéma,

Pallas Film, CAB
Productions, Vortex
Sutra, ARTE France
Cinéma, ZDF/ARTE,
Orange Studio, RTS
Radio Télévision
Suisse, SRG SSR
**Production
Companies**
CG Cinéma presents
with Pallas Film, Cab
Productions, Vortex
Sutra in association
with Ezekiel
Production with ARTE
France Cinéma, ZDF/
ARTE, Orange Studio,
RTS Radio Television
Suisse, SRG SSR

With the support
of Eurimages
With the participation
of Centre National
du Cinéma et de
l'Image Animée,
ARTE France, ARTE
GEIE, Canal+, Ciné+
With the support of
MDM - Mitteldeutsche
Medienförderung,
OFFF - Deutscher
Filmförderfonds,
Medienboard Berlin-
Brandenburg, FFA -
Filmförderungsanstalt,
Office Fédéral
de la Culture
(DFI) Suisse, BLS

Business Location
Südtirol-Alto Adige
With the participation
of Suisse Cinéform
and the support of
Loterie Romande
A co-production
with CG Cinéma,
Pallas Film, CAB
Productions, Vortex
Sutra, ARTE France
Cinéma, ZDF/ARTE,
Orange Studio, RTS
Radio Télévision
Suisse, SRG SSR
Developed with the
support of the MEDIA
Programme of the
European Union

Cast
Juliette Binoche
Maria Enders
Kristen Stewart
Valentine
Chloé Grace Moretz
Jo-Ann Ellis
Lars Eidinger
Klaus Diesterweg
Johnny Flynn
Christopher Giles
Brady Corbet
Piers Roaldson
Hanns Zischler
Henryk Wald
Angela Winkler
Rosa Melchior
Nora von

Waldstätten
superhero film actress

**Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]**
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Curzon Film World

French theatrical title
Sils Maria

The Alps, present day. International superstar Maria Enders and her assistant Valentine are on their way to Zurich to accept an award on behalf of Wilhelm Melchior, the director whose play, 'Maloja Snake', launched Maria's career 20 years ago. En route, they receive word that Melchior has died. After the ceremony, director Klaus Diesterweg explains that he wants to restage 'Maloja Snake' in London with Maria and Hollywood enfant terrible Jo-Ann Ellis. Maria balks at the prospect of playing the older role, but eventually agrees. Maria and Valentine travel to Melchior's chalet in the Swiss mountains near Sils Maria and run through scenes of 'Maloja Snake'. They

argue over its interpretations, and about Jo-Ann's career and acting. Maria and Valentine wake up early to see the 'Maloja Snake', a rare Alpine cloud formation. Valentine suddenly disappears. Some time later, Maria is in London for the play's dress rehearsals. She goes to meet the director and Jo-Ann to discuss new scenes, when they find out that Jo-Ann's boyfriend's wife has attempted suicide; they end the meeting, expecting the arrival of the paparazzi. Maria takes a short break during dress rehearsal to meet with an up-and-coming director who wants her to star in a big-budget sci-fi thriller. Maria returns to rehearsal and gives Jo-Ann a note about a scene. She refuses it.

The Connection

France/Belgium 2014
Director: Cédric Jimenez
Certificate 15 135m 16s



Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

Between its truncated original title *La French* (alluding to *The French Connection*) and the opening text announcing a film "loosely based on real events", *The Connection* signals its hybrid nature. This is a genre movie that is also a quasi-biopic of Pierre Michel, the French judge who fought to dismantle the drugs trade 'French connection' in Marseille in the late 1970s.

Assigned to the organised crime unit, Michel (Jean Dujardin) goes into battle against drugs baron Gaëtan Zampa (Gilles Lellouche), whose band oversees the conversion of Turkish opium into heroin and ships it to the US. Michel's work is hampered by corruption, however, and he soon discovers that police officers are among those in Zampa's pay, and that even the office of socialist mayor Gaston Defferre (Féodor Atkine) is not immune. The conflation of Mafia-related crime and political scandal is an enduring Marseille trope famously denounced by the films of Robert Guédiguian, whose regular actor Gérard Meylan here plays bent cop Mariette. Similarly, the figure of the crusading French judge is familiar from the French political thrillers of the 1970s.

However, *The Connection* works primarily within the French gangster genre, albeit nodding towards America with references to Martin Scorsese and Michael Mann among others. Thus the film, taking liberties with real events, builds up the Michel-Zampa duel in generic fashion, contrasting their lifestyles yet pointing to parallels between them. Both are seen as faithful husbands and good fathers – up to a point, as they still have to go out and commit or fight crime; Céline Sallette (as Michel's wife) and Mélanie Doutey (Zampa's) are chiefly there to worry about their husbands. The two men's climactic meeting on top of a hill overlooking the sea nods more towards Jean-Pierre Melville's 1966 gangster epic *Le deuxième*



Passage to Marseille: Jean Dujardin

souffle (also set in Marseille) than verisimilitude.

The strong Michel-Zampa mirroring leitmotif is given further weight by the players. If Dujardin has an international presence thanks to *The Artist* (2011), in France he and Lellouche are known as close friends and are frequently paired on screen. Nevertheless, Lellouche somewhat lacks gravitas as Zampa, and *The Connection* is definitely Dujardin's film: he excels at projecting a vision of Michel that is at once tough, committed and romantic. The star's slightly old-fashioned matinee-idol looks work wonders in the 70s costumes. In this respect, the film's design is impeccable, opulent but not ostentatious, evoking the decade accurately with the right period cars and furniture but without overdoing the shaggy hair and flares.

Relative newcomer director Cédric Jimenez, born and bred in Marseille, offers an insider's view of the city with nifty handheld camerawork and a narrative that, notwithstanding a few *longueurs*, remains gripping. *The Connection* is that rare breed, a well-made, mainstream French genre film that crosses borders. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Ilan Goldman
Screenplay/
Dialogue
Audrey Diwan
Cédric Jimenez
Director of
Photography
Laurent Tangy
Editing
Sophie Reine
Art Direction
Jean-Philippe
Moreaux
Original Music
Guillaume Roussel
Sound
Cédric Deloche
Pascal Villard
Marc Doine
Costumes
Carine Sarfati

©Legende Films,
Gaumont, France
2 Cinéma, Scope
Pictures, RTBF –
Télévision Belge
Production
Companies
Gaumont presents
a Legende Films
production
In co-production with

Gaumont, France
2 Cinéma, Scope
Pictures, RTBF –
Télévision Belge
With the participation
of Canal+, Ciné+,
France Télévisions
With the support
of la Wallonie and
la région Provence-
Alpes-Côte d'Azur
In collaboration with
CNC, Tax Shelter of
the Federal Belgian
Government via
Scope Invest, Centre
du Cinéma et de
l'Audiodivuel de la
Fédération Wallonie
Bruxelles and VOD
Executive Producer
Marc Vadé
Film Extracts
Greed in the
Sun/100,000 Dollars
au soleil (1964)

Cast
Jean Dujardin
Pierre Michel
Gilles Lellouche
Gaëtan Zampa
Céline Sallette

Jacqueline Michel
Mélanie Doutey
Christiane Zampa
Guillaume Goux
Jose Alvarez
Bruno Todeschini
banker
Moussa Maaskri
Franky Manzoni
Cyril Lecomte
Marco Da Costa
Bernard Blancan
Lucien Aime-Blanc
Gérard Meylan
Ange Mariette
Eric Fraticelli
Bianchi
Féodor Atkine
Gaston Defferre
Benoit Magimel
'Crazy Horse'

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Picturehouse
Entertainment

French theatrical title
Le French

Marseille, 1970s. Pierre Michel, a judge at the juvenile court, is moved to the organised crime section at a time when the city is the world's narcotics hub, with Turkish opium being transformed into heroin and shipped to the US. Michel embarks on a campaign to hunt down the criminals behind this 'French connection'. In the process he must smash local godfather Gaëtan Zampa's organisation and overcome resistance and corruption among the local police (he discovers policemen in Zampa's gang) and the office of socialist mayor Gaston Defferre. The crusade puts a strain on Michel's family life with his wife and two young daughters. Zampa's organisation is weakened by inter-gang warfare, ending in a bloodbath. After he berates Defferre for not acting, Michel is taken off the case. However, when American colleagues contact him sometime later, he asks Defferre, now minister of the interior in the new Mitterrand government, to reinstate him. He launches a new assault on the drugs connection, leading to a successful raid on a laboratory and the arrest of Da Costa, a key figure in the drugs nexus. Fearing that Da Costa will talk but unable to eliminate him, Zampa's gang has Michel assassinated. Zampa goes into hiding but is eventually arrested (and later commits suicide). Defferre makes a speech celebrating the victory of justice over crime and pays tribute to Michel – but two corrupt policemen flank him as he does so.

old and weak. So when a director proposes that she take the role of Helena in a revival of *Maloja Snake*, with unstable Hollywood starlet Jo-Ann Ellis as Sigrid, Maria immediately hates the idea – in her acting process, to play a character is to identify with them. But as she discusses the offer with an old flame and former co-star, he reveals that he shares her interpretation, which causes her to play devil's advocate and (consciously or not) influences her decision to take the role.

This tension between the old and new, past and present, and the inherent value of each, is apparent in the opening sequence of a train trundling through the Swiss Alps. This isn't an antiseptic Eurostar or Frecciarossa but a noisy, bumpy, *From Russia with Love*-style affair with wood panelling. A young woman (Stewart) juggles two smartphones while attempting to manoeuvre around the carriage in the hope of getting a better signal in the mountains; despite her rock-chick look (a nod to Stewart's role in *The Runaways* and her own love of punk), she's immediately identifiable as a personal assistant, even before we hear her attempting to reschedule the date of Maria's divorce hearing. The train and the personal assistant, though actively working against each other here, are connected by a sense of romance and luxury – of taking the scenic route, of having someone who does everything for you. Maria reaps the benefits of both, just as she has achieved success in the theatre and by "acting hanging from wires in front of green screens", but it's only Stewart's Valentine who can see the value of both. This ability, which she also applies to Jo-Ann's turn in an otherwise loud and lousy big budget sci-fi flick, is something that Maria repeatedly perceives as frivolous and strictly generational.

As Maria and Valentine rehearse *Maloja Snake* inside and around a chalet in the Swiss mountains, their line readings run into their commentary on the text, and often it's not immediately apparent what is or isn't part of the play. The ambiguities these dialogue diphthongs create enhance the power dynamic between the two women, and emphasise the underlying sexual tension: Maria, with her cropped hair, and Valentine, with her inconspicuous manner and large-frame spectacles (a nod to the movie cliché of a woman's beauty being imperceptible behind glasses and a bun) could easily be a couple, or perhaps best friends arguing while on holiday. Pushing and pulling at the text is no different from fighting with each other, and soon hostility creeps – or is suddenly interjected – into even their friendliest exchanges.

Despite her apparently cool manner, Valentine takes Maria's dismissals of her interpretations personally. She loathes being unheard, and by extension, invisible. While on a hike to see the miraculous 'Maloja Snake' cloud formation that gives the play its name, Valentine suddenly disappears, and the screen fades to black. When the narrative picks up weeks later in London, Maria has a new assistant, begging the question: did Valentine quit, or did she even exist at all? In their only exchange about how to perform the text, Jo-Ann breezily dismisses Maria's suggestions. The camera tracks forward to Maria as the house lights go down and she lights another cigarette, wearing the slightest of smiles, and the uncertainty over who or what Valentine is to Maria only grows. **S**

Danny Collins

USA 2014
Director: Dan Fogelman
Certificate 15 106m 27s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Today's older generation of Hollywood actors must surely offer up silent prayers of thanks for baby-boomer audiences. The generation who want to reimagine retirement have a keen appetite for long-established stars in it's-never-too-late dramas such as *Hope Springs* (2012) and *Last Vegas* (2013). Dan Fogelman, who penned the latter, a hoary *Hangover* for the hip-replacement crowd, plays a variation on the same tune in his directorial debut. A slight but conspicuously well-played dramedy about an elderly soft-rock star seeking redemption through his abandoned son and the art of songwriting, it's both knowing and astonishingly sentimental.

Based very loosely on a true 2005 incident, in which British folkie Steve Tilston discovered that John Lennon had written him a supportive letter in 1971 that he'd never received, it's a breezy paean to the power of the fresh start. Fogelman, who wrote the nimble starting-over comedy *Crazy, Stupid, Love* (2011), has a sharp eye for the comic incongruities of the senior rock 'n' roll lifestyle. Propped up by cocaine and a bimbo fiancée, and moaning about his ageing fans ("The Golden Girls, eating liquorice in the front row"), hero Danny Collins is a ball of wry self-loathing. Al Pacino plays him wittily as a loquacious, glad-handing mash-up of Billy Joel and George Hamilton, equal parts fake tan, self-mocking patter and MOR balladeer. There's even an extradiegetic frisson from the use of familiar Pacino photographs from the 70s as Danny's album covers.

Pacino has had a string of these grandstanding older roles recently, in *You Don't Know Jack* (2010), *Phil Spector* (2013) and *The Humbling* (2014), and he has managed to dig out something different in each. Here he layers contrition beneath the bluster, even when the performance rolls like a big wheel in a Georgia cottonfield. When he dials it down, for a self-deprecating flirtation with Hilton hotel manager Mary (a no-nonsense Annette Bening), the film finds some real charm. As Danny hammers out for her an original-but-unexceptional Leonard Cohen-style ballad with painful slowness, her polite, perplexed reaction is an understated gift.

But what brings notes of unexpected pathos



Christopher Plummer, Al Pacino, Katarina Cas

are Pacino's scenes with Bobby Cannavale, playing his unwelcoming son Tom with a weary, wary stubbornness that deftly counters Pacino's practised bonhomie. Predictably, the film ladens Tom and his family with an ongoing problem (an ADHD-afflicted moppet of a child) that Danny's money can solve with a private school. More unexpectedly, it also throws in a terminal-illness twist midway, which frankly feels melodramatic but results in some of the film's most touching scenes.

Visually unexceptional, *Danny Collins* relies on its snappy writing and fine cast to do all the heavy lifting. Fogelman lets the camera sit still to dig into the more emotional scenes, but he is too reliant on montages and Pacino's riffing monologues ("I'm the MC, the court jester") to carry the story. Everything is also heavily underlined by the ubiquitous and unsubtle use of John Lennon songs, from the ironic 'Working Class Hero' playing in Danny's high-end sports car to 'Beautiful Boy' for his rediscovery of Tom. There's no respite either from product placement – both Hilton Hotels and Mercedes-Benz get nearly as much screen time as Pacino. Most of all, the film's one-note characters and feelgood theme of easy forgiveness make one faintly nostalgic for chewier second-chance stories such as *Jerry Maguire* (1996) or *As Good As It Gets* (1997), in which writer-directors Cameron Crowe and James L. Brooks respectively managed to temper redemption with a little more reality. 📺

The Dead Lands

New Zealand/United Kingdom/USA 2014
Director: Toa Fraser
Certificate 15 107m 2s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

After most of his kin are slaughtered in a treacherous nocturnal attack, a young survivor is forced to trek through hostile terrain to escape death and avenge the killing of his tribe. It's the kind of story that invites the label 'archetypal', which is perhaps why variants of it have provided the basic plot for the Inuit-language *Atanarjuat* (2001), the Mayan-language *Apocalypto* (2006) and now this Maori-language feature *The Dead Lands*. Given the task of introducing viewers to an unfamiliar culture and tongue, it helps to have a narrative whose shape and motivations are clear-cut and readily comprehensible. The risk, though, is that what aims to be straightforward can wind up being simplistic and cliché-ridden – and it's a trap that Toa Fraser's film doesn't manage to avoid.

For much of its running time, *The Dead Lands* comes across as a standard-issue martial-arts movie with Maori top-dressing. The traditional indigenous martial-arts technique involved, *mau rakau*, is undeniably dramatic, involving as it does all the face-pulling, tongue-dangling, howling and barking familiar to anyone who's ever attended an All Blacks match, plus the lethal deployment of razor-sharp wooden paddles capable of slitting a throat or severing an arm in a single blow. But we do get an awful lot of this. And rarely does Fraser let his camera pull back to take in the choreography of the combat in a sustained mid-shot; nearly all the fight scenes are shot in close-up shakycam with frenetic split-second cutting. The balletic element of martial arts that can, as the best Asian directors know, lend visual elegance to even the most brutal onslaught, here largely goes for nothing.

Almost equally monotonous are the endlessly reiterated speeches – or, all too frequently, bombastic rants – about pride, honour and glory, qualities that serve as the overriding motivation of virtually every character, good or bad. This is an intensely, even stiflingly macho world. At one point it looks as though we may get some respite from all the boy's-own bravado when a good-looking young female warrior shows up; but she's soon written out of the action, as if she's an embarrassment, a token presence to be checked in and promptly checked out again.

The New Zealand landscape, of course, looks sublime; but then we knew that from Peter Jackson *passim*. Within the limitations of the script, several members of the cast turn in creditable performances. Te Kohe Tuhaka makes a fine sneering villain, exuding menace even – or especially – at his most soft-spoken. And Lawrence Makoare, a veteran of several of Jackson's Tolkien films, brings unexpected depth to his portrayal of the enigmatic, possibly non-human Warrior, glorying in his power and fearsome reputation but burdened by the consciousness of his own accumulated guilt. There's even an echo of *King Lear* ("As flies to wanton boys...") in his grim pronouncement: "The gods have made this life to take pleasure in our sufferings."

In terms of its plot and action sequences, *The Dead Lands* seems calculated to appeal strongly to an adolescent male audience. But whether that same audience will sit through a film in subtitled Maori is rather more doubtful. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Jessie Nelson

Nimitt Mankad

Written by

Dan Fogelman

Director of

Photography

Steve Yedlin

Editor

Julie Monroe

Production Designer

Dan Bishop

Music

Theodore Shapiro

Ryan Adams

Sound Mixer

Scott Harber

Costume Designer

Sophie De Rakoff

©Danny Collins

Productions, LLC

Production

Companies

A ShivHans Pictures,

Handwritten Films

production in

association with

Big Indie Pictures

A film by Dan

Fogelman

Executive Producers

Denise Di Novi

Shivani Rawat

Declan Baldwin

Monica Levinson

Cast

Al Pacino

Danny Collins

Annette Bening

Mary Sinclair

Jennifer Garner

Samantha Leigh

Donnelly

Bobby Cannavale

Tom Donnelly

Christopher

Plummer

Frank Grubman

Nick Offerman

Guy DeLoach

Josh Peck

Nicky Ernst

Katarina Cas

Sophie

Giselle Eisenberg

Hope Donnelly

Melissa Benoist

Jamie

Scott Lawrence

Dr Ryan Kurtz

Dolby Digital/

Datasat/SDDS

In Colour

Distributor

El Films

Los Angeles, present day. In 1971, young singer-songwriter Danny Collins is compared to John Lennon in an interview. Forty years later, Danny, now an elderly soft-rock star, is given a birthday present: an encouraging letter written to him by Lennon in 1971 and never delivered. Danny abandons his tour, stops taking drugs and leaves his unfaithful young fiancée to move into a New Jersey hotel, where he starts writing a song. Danny visits 40-year-old Tom, the son he never met, and tries to make amends. He goes on a date with Mary, the hotel manager. He arranges a place at an expensive special school for his granddaughter Hope, who has ADHD. Tom admits that he has a terminal blood disorder. Danny stays with him in New York during his chemotherapy treatment. Danny learns that his money is dwindling. Performing a small gig, he loses his nerve and goes back to his old songs. Afterwards he takes cocaine with his ex-fiancée, and fights with Tom and a disappointed Mary. He apologises for his bad behaviour. Repentant, he resumes his tour to make money for Tom's family, and accompanies Tom to his post-chemotherapy medical tests, assuring him that everything will be OK.

Fast & Furious 7

USA/Japan 2015

Directed by: James Wan

Certificate 12A 137m 18s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

This latest instalment of the *Fast & Furious* franchise, a saga that began in 2001, is the sixth and last to co-star Paul Walker, who died in 2013 in a car accident. The publicity surrounding the lengths gone to in completing the film without him has been enough to elevate what would've likely been just another lucrative entry in a lucrative film series to event status – something in the order of a public wake. Many critics are now rating the *Furious* films as either marking a sea change in action filmmaking or a 'dumb fun' institution.

Taken altogether, the *Furious* films don't rank among the best new franchises of the past two decades (for the record, those are *Resident Evil*, *Mission: Impossible*, *Final Destination* and *Step Up*), though they have certainly had their moments. I am thinking particularly of the climax of *Fast Five* (2011), in which Walker's Brian O'Conner and Vin Diesel's Dom Toretto, driving matching matte-black Dodge Chargers and dragging a massive bank vault behind them, use their cargo as a wrecking ball to sweep police cruisers off the streets of Rio de Janeiro.

Fast Five was the third of four *Furious* films handled by director Justin Lin, who has been replaced here by James Wan, taking his first spin with the series. The changing of the guard isn't an upgrade – known for his work in the horror genre, including the first of the ever-more-wretched *Saw* films, Wan shows palpable strain under the burden he's inherited, which includes a tribe-



Jason Statham

sized ensemble cast. Like all of the *Furious* films since 2006's *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*, *Fast & Furious 7* was written by Chris Morgan, who must shoulder a portion of the blame for freighting the film with interminable exposition involving an omnipotent surveillance system.

Where the plot is needlessly cumbersome, the vehicular action in the *Furious* films has all the heft of a Matchbox-car pile-up. "Wan renders the weightiest items weightless," *The New Yorker's* Richard Brody wrote recently, sounding a note frequently heard from admirers of the franchise's Looney Tunes set pieces, and while such comments are common, one finds significantly less discussion of *what* exactly it means to have done with the traditional linkage between intellect, morality and physics in action filmmaking.

The other major personnel change, of course, is due to the mid-shoot death of Walker, whose role in providing these films a degree of human ballast and general likeability opposite half-melted action figure Diesel cannot at this point be overestimated. Walker stars in the film's one real white-knuckler set piece, a fight with Tony Jaa in a bus that ends up dangling off the precipice of a mountain pass. But he is quite obviously played by a double in its rematch, and the manner in which his performance is cut around throughout suggests that the filmmakers had scant footage to work with. Not that there's much cause to be confident that things would have come out better had tragedy not struck. Considering how little use is found for action royalty Jason Statham and Kurt Russell, or a dead-game Ronda Rousey, *Fast & Furious 7* is defined by its ability to squander surplus. Ⓢ



Spear pressure: Te Kohe Tuhaka

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Matthew Metcalfe	Production Companies GFC/Fightertown in association with XYZ Films, New Zealand Film Commission, New Zealand Film Production Fund	Lawrence Makoare The Warrior
Producer Glenn Standring	Written by Glenn Standring	Te Kohe Tuhaka Wirepa
Cinematographer Leon Narbey	Editor Dan Kircher	Xavier Horan Rangi
Production Designer Grant Major	Music Don McGlashan	George Henare Tane
Sound Recordist Adam Martin	Costume Designer Barbara Darragh	Raukura Turei Mehe
Stunt/Fight Co-ordinator Steve McQuillan	Executive Producers Peter Hampden Nick Spicer	Rena Owen Grandmother
	In Colour [2.35:1]	
	Subtitles	
	Distributor Icon Film Distribution	

©GFC (Warrior)
Ltd & Backwell
(Warrior) Ltd

Cast
James Rolleston
Hongi

Pre-colonial New Zealand. Tane, a Maori chieftain, welcomes Wirepa, son of a neighbouring chieftain, to his village. Wirepa has ostensibly come to pay homage to the bones of his ancestors, but he secretly desecrates them, then tries to put the blame on Hongi, Tane's teenage son. Tane doesn't believe him, but Wirepa and his men utter threats as they leave. That night they return and slaughter Tane and most of the tribe. Hongi, who is knocked unconscious, is the sole male survivor. Berated by his aunt, Hongi resolves to follow Wirepa and take revenge.

Wirepa and his men take a shortcut through the Dead Lands, said to be haunted by the spirits of a vanished tribe. Counselling by the ghost of his grandmother, Hongi seeks a dangerous alliance with the Warrior, a man-eating monster in human form who inhabits the Dead Lands. The Warrior's senior wife persuades him to help Hongi, to atone for his past misdeeds. They follow Wirepa's band through the forest, attacking them and killing them one by one. They encounter a female warrior whom Hongi thinks might help them, but the Warrior kills her. Wirepa and his few remaining men make a stand in a hill fort. Hongi and the Warrior kill all except Wirepa; the Warrior is wounded and Wirepa finishes him off. Hongi defeats Wirepa but refuses him the honour of death in combat.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Neal H. Moritz Vin Diesel Michael Fottrell	Sound Design/Supervision Peter Brown	Fuji Television Network, Inc. Completed with assistance from the Georgia Film, Music and Digital Entertainment Office
Written by Chris Morgan	Costume Designer Sanja Milkovic Hays	Quebec - Production Services Tax Credit, Colorado Office of Film Television Media, Abu Dhabi Film Commission
Based on characters created by Gary Scott Thompson	Supervising Stunt Co-ordinator Joel Kramer	The filmmakers acknowledge the assistance of the New Zealand Government's Screen Production Grant
Directors of Photography Stephen F. Windon Marc Spicer	Production Companies Universal Pictures presents in association with MRC an Original Film/One Race Films production	Executive Producers Amanda Lewis
Edited by Christian Wagner Dylan Highsmith Kirk Morri Leigh Folsom Boyd	Production Designer Bill Brzeski	
Music		

Samantha Vincent
Chris Morgan
Film Extracts
The Fast and the Furious (2001)
Fast & Furious (2009)
Fast Five (2011)
Fast & Furious 6 (2013)

Cast

Vin Diesel
Dominic Toretto
Paul Walker
Brian O'Conner
Dwayne Johnson
Luke Hobbs
Michelle Rodriguez
Leticia Ortiz, 'Letty'
Tyrese Gibson

Roman Pearce
Chris 'Ludacris'
Bridges
Tej
Jordana Brewster
Mia
Dijimon Hounsou
Mose Jakande
Tony Jaa
Kiet
Ronda Rousey
Kara
Nathalie Emmanuel
Ramsey
Kurt Russell
Frank Petty, 'Mr Nobody'
Jason Statham
Deckard Shaw
Sung Kang
Han Seoul-Oh

Lucas Black
Sean Boswell
Elsa Pataky
Elena
Noel Gugliemi
Hector
John Brotherton
Sheppard
Luke Evans
Owen Shaw

Dolby Digital/ Datasat Digital Sound
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International
UK & Ire

Los Angeles, the present. Deckard Shaw swears revenge on Dominic Toretto and his crew, who put his brother Owen in a coma. Deckard receives information about his quarry from DSS agent Luke Hobbs, whom he disables in combat, and travels to Tokyo, where he kills crew member Han Seoul-Oh. After a bomb destroys his home, Dominic puts his crew on the offensive, hooking up with government agent Frank Petty. Brian, Dominic's right-hand man, is happy to get back into action, having grown restless with family life. The crew go to the Caucasus Mountains to rescue kidnapped hacker Ramsey from a mercenary

named Jakande, hoping to retrieve a piece of software, 'God's Eye', that will allow them to track Deckard. The search for God's Eye takes the crew and Ramsey to Abu Dhabi, where they briefly recover it, only to lose it to Deckard in an ambush in which Petty is wounded. The crew return to Los Angeles to wait for the inevitable assault by Deckard and Jakande, who have harnessed the power of God's Eye. After a chase through the city streets, Jakande is killed when his helicopter is destroyed, and Deckard is taken into custody by a recovered Hobbs. Brian, having had a last taste of action, returns happily to family life.

A Fuller Life

USA 2013
Director: Samantha Fuller
Certificate 15 80m 22s

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Samuel Fuller may well be the most lavishly eulogised of the mid-century Hollywood auteurs, but much of what's beloved about him, it seems, has little to do with his strangely, uniquely hyperbolic movies, the excesses of which are not always easy to parse, and more to do with Fuller himself, as gadfly, storyteller, icon and recalcitrant individualist. Certainly, this redundant documentary portrait has little or nothing to say about the films, but instead focuses on Fuller's life, as put down in his autobiography *A Third Face* (published in 2002, several years after his death). Literally, Fuller's daughter Samantha has various colleagues, contemporaries and celebrity fans sit in his cluttered office/bungalow and read sections of the book aloud to the camera, as illustrative stock footage, photographs and film clips are stitched together. That's it.

Clearly, a critic's or scholar's input would've been useful, because Fuller is not insightful on the unique textures of his own work. The book is a fun read but the passages chosen here are on the whole lifeless. Who reads what section – James Franco, Tim Roth, Monte Hellman, Constance Towers, Mark Hamill, Wim Wenders, several of whom smoke Sammy cigars in homage – is of no interest, and neither is wondering why Fuller's daughter so emphasises the man's three years fighting in WWII (about a full third of the film) or his life-changing joy at her own birth.

More than anything, this modest doc comes off as a clumsy, protracted promotional video not for Fuller's movies, the rights to which are not owned by the family, but for the book – perhaps a new edition is at the presses? 📞

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Gillian Wallace
Horvat
Samantha Fuller

Based on

Sam Fuller's memoirs *A Third Face: My Tale of Writing, Fighting & Filmmaking*

Directors of

Photography

Seamus McGarvey
Hilton Goring
Tyler Purcell
Rachel Dunn

Edited by

Tyler Purcell

Original Music

Paul Alexander Fuller
Sabi Tulok
Canaan Triplett
Phil Ruc
Eric Bautista

Production Sound

©Chrisam Films Inc.
Production
Company

Company

Chrisam Films Inc.
presents a Chrisam
Films Inc. production
Executive Producer

Christa Lang-Fuller

Film Extracts

Shock Corridor (1963)

Underworld

U.S.A. (1960)

The Madonna and the Dragon (1989)

Scandal Sheet (1951)

Street of No

Return (1989)

Run of the

Arrow (1957)

Power of the

Press (1943)

Shockproof (1949)

It Happened in

Hollywood (1937)

The Big Red

One (1980)

Merrill's Marauders

(1962)

The Steel

Helmet (1951)

Verboten (1958)

The Crimson

Kimono (1959)

Pickup on South

Street (1953)

The Naked

Kiss (1964)

Pierrot le Fou (1965)

Dead Pigeon

on Beethoven

Street (1974)

China Gate (1957)

White Dog (1981)

Cast

James Franco

Jennifer Beals

Bill Duke

James Toback

Kelly Ward

Perry Lang

Robert Carradine

Mark Hamill

Joe Dante

Tim Roth

Wim Wenders

Monte Hellman

Buck Henry

Constance Towers

William Friedkin

In Colour and

Black & White

[1.78:1]

Distributor

Contemporary Films

Futuro Beach

Brazil/Germany 2013
Director: Karim Ainouz

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Futuro Beach is a triptych, the first third of which suggests that the death of German surfer Heiko off a Brazilian beach will be the focus of its narrative and its central romance. The body is lost but a sexual connection has swiftly sprung up between Heiko's friend Konrad (Clemens Schick) and Donato (Wagner Moura), the lifeguard who tried to save them both. "If I find him, will you stay?" asks Donato, hoping to prevent Konrad from returning to Germany. But the dead man, like the lost Anna in *L'avventura* (1960), fades from the narrative; the film, like Antonioni's, is more interested in the inconclusive and fruitless quest for contentment than in the specific search for a person or a body.

In the event it is not Konrad who transplants himself but Donato, relocating to Germany in the film's second section to pursue a relationship that proves unsatisfactory for reasons never made quite clear. Certainly it is over by part three, in which Donato's brother Ayrton, first glimpsed as a child on the titular Brazilian beach, comes to find his brother in Berlin and confront him with what he has left behind. Now we learn that Donato's flight to Berlin – and full embrace of his sexuality – has entailed complete severance from a family to which he seemed devoted. His mother has died during his absence.

It's one of many mysterious gaps in the film's emotional logic that the gentle and responsible Donato would have thus abandoned his closest kin; and that, in an internet-enabled age, Ayrton has been unable to track him down without physically travelling to his adopted home. But director Karim Ainouz (*The Silver Cliff*, *Madame Satã*) appears less concerned with psychological or technological realism than with the examination of existential solitude: the unattainability of anything other than fleeting connection with fellow humans, and the resulting absence of purpose.

Fulfilment is achieved here only through extremes of physical experience: risky deep-water surfing; violent sex; ritualistic exercise; dancing in nightclubs loud enough to blot out thought. In its loving portrayal of the latter two practices, *Futuro*



Waiting for happiness: Wagner Moura

Beach recalls the Claire Denis film *Beau Travail* (1999), another ambiguous portrayal of passion, duty and the abandonment of responsibility. Yet *Futuro Beach* ultimately offers even less for a struggling viewer to cling to than does Denis's classic. It is composed of hints and anticlimaxes: a love affair that comes to nothing; an odyssey of self-discovery that yields only more uncertainty; family relationships that sour for no identified reason.

Is it a comment on Brazilian attitudes to homosexuality, or just on one character's psychology, that Donato chooses a lonely life away from the beach and water he loves over coming out in his homeland? We don't know, just as we don't know what breaks up the couple whose intimacy has been so dramatically forged in the film's opening sequence. The result is a film that feels admirably true to life's uncertainties but consequently a bit drab to watch, especially through a mid-section that focuses on only the most depressing aspects of Donato and Konrad's relationship.

Moura and Schick tough it out through the patchy character development, offering complex and appealing performances. Ayrton, played by Jesuíta Barbosa, is a more predictable creation, whose screen time pretty much consists of one long strop. Such sullen self-destructiveness is, however, a tonal fit for a film whose characters all seem adept at identifying what makes them happy and then walking away from it. 📞

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Geórgia Costa Araújo

Producer

Hank Levine

Written by

Felipe Bragança

Director of

Photography

Ali Olcay Gözkaya

Editor

Isabela Monteiro

Art Director

Marcos Pedroso

Music

Hauschka

Sound Recording

Dirk Homann

Daniilo Carvalho

Costume Designer

Camila Soares

Production

Companies

Ancine – Agência

Nacional do Cinema,

FSA – Fundo Setorial

do Audiovisual, BRDE

- Banco Regional de

Desenvolvimento

do Extremo Sul,

Sabesp present

Produced by Coração

da Selva, DetailFilm,

Hank Levine

Film, Watchmen

Productions

In co-production

with HBO Latin

America Originals

With the collaboration

of The Post Republic

With the support

of Deutscher

Filmförderfonds,

Medienboard

Berlin-Brandenburg,

Filmförderung

Hamburg Schleswig-

Holstein, BNDES,

FINEP – Agência

Brasileira da Inovação,

Ministro da Ciência,

Tecnologia e Inovação,

Governo Federal Brasil

With the participation

of Electrobras Chest,

Oi, Banco do Nordeste

Supported by

Governo do Estado

do Ceará - Secretaria

da Cultura, ProAC -

Programa de Ação

Cultural de São Paulo,

Governo do Estado de

São Paulo, Programa

de Apoio ao Cinema

Paulista 2010

Selected for

the Programa

Petrobras Cultural

BR Petrobras

presents

A film by Karim Ainouz

Developed, produced,

completed and

distributed using

public funds

managed through

Agência Nacional do

Cinema – Ancine

Executive Producers

Luciano Patrick

Andro Steinborn

Cast

Wagner Moura

Donato

Clemens Schick

Konrad

Jesuíta Barbosa

Ayrton aged 18

Fred Lima

Heiko

Thomás Aquino

Jefferson

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Peccadillo

Pictures Ltd

A documentary about Samuel Fuller (1912-1997), in which various associates and admirers read aloud from his autobiography 'A Third Face'. The film follows Fuller's trajectory from newsboy, scriptwriter and WWII infantryman to iconoclastic Hollywood filmmaker, finding acclaim in the New Wave climate of the 1960s.

Fortaleza, Brazil, the present. Soldier and lifeguard Donato is on the beach with his younger brother Ayrton when two German surfers get into difficulties. Donato pulls one of them, Konrad, to safety but cannot save his friend Heiko. Later Donato visits Konrad in hospital and informs him of the loss of his friend; afterwards, he and Konrad go to bed together. They continue seeing each other as Konrad seeks his friend's body, but when it can't be found he plans his return to Berlin. Donato visits him

in Berlin and an uneasy relationship is established.

Eight years later, Ayrton turns up in Berlin to find Donato, with whom he has had no contact. He tells him that their mother has died. Donato contacts Konrad, now his ex, for support; Ayrton reacts by stealing Konrad's motorbike and going out clubbing. Konrad tracks him down, and after a confrontation invites him to stay in his apartment. Ayrton accepts. The three men go on a motorcycle road trip together.

Get Hard

USA 2014
Director: Etan Cohen
Certificate 15 100m 10s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

"Fear of sucking dick will give a man strength he didn't know he had." That's the wonderfully progressive mantra of *Get Hard*, in which James, a white-collar schnook played by Will Ferrell, is so terrified at the prospect of going to prison (he's been railroaded by a villainous colleague at his multibillion-dollar law firm) that he hires the African-American guy who washes his car to teach him how to hold his own in the joint.

There's a good satirical premise here in the way James immediately assumes that the diminutive Darnell (Kevin Hart) is a former hardened criminal: the scene in which he uses statistical analysis about the racial makeup of America's incarcerated population to back up his suspicions is touchy and uncomfortable in a way that resonates beyond the space of the film.

In almost every other instance, however, *Get Hard* strip-mines grotesque stereotypes for depthless, superficial laughs, as in the shots of James kitted out in full Lil Wayne drag to fit in with a clan of gang-bangers (headed by rapper T.I.). The script's ultimate vision of hard-won ebony-and-ivory camaraderie is built on a mutual attitude of homophobia that clearly transcends economic and ethnic boundaries: the spectre of gay rape hangs over every single scene, peaking (if that's the right word) in an extended gross-out set piece in which James decides to exercise a can't-beat-em-then-join-em policy in a restaurant bathroom.

Not that heterosexuality gets a better rap here: it's disconcerting to see a gifted comedienne like Alison Brie, in the thankless role of James's fiancée, reduced to playing a gold-digging, lingerie-clad cipher who uses her body to bamboozle her future husband (Darnell makes sure to call her a "bitch" in her final scene in case the audience wasn't sure what to think of her).

It's not that *Get Hard* is 'un-PC' – which is often the best thing a comedy can be – so much as that it's lazy: it doesn't challenge its audience or itself. Director Etan Cohen did a lot better



Tough guise: Will Ferrell, Kevin Hart

skewering racial politics and social mores in his script for *Tropic Thunder* (2008). As a first-time feature director, however, he's green and undisciplined, and Ferrell and Hart simply don't get enough of a rapport going to rescue anything but a tiny handful of interactions (though the huge disparity in their body sizes is the sort of running visual joke that works all the better for being mostly left unsaid).

Ferrell's broad pantomime of white American male authority in crisis has gotten creaky; 15 years after his George W. Bush impression on *Saturday Night Live*, his grinning-idiot naivety no longer feels like a timely comic creation. Hart, meanwhile, is clearly an ascendant star, albeit one with putrid taste when it comes to material. Neither he nor Ferrell seems particularly invested in *Get Hard*, but their indifference is hardly a point of pride. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Will Ferrell
Adam McKay
Chris Henchy

Screenplay

Jay Martel
Ian Roberts

Story

Adam McKay
Jay Martel
Ian Roberts
Etan Cohen

Director of

Photography
Tim Suhrstedt

Edited by

Mike Sale

Production Designer

Maier Ahmad

Music

Christophe Beck

Production

Sound Mixer

David Wyman

Costumes

Designed by

Shay Cunliffe

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Entertainment Inc.

and Ratpac-Dune

Entertainment LLC

Production Companies

A Warner Bros. Pictures present in association with Ratpac-Dune Entertainment a Gary Sanchez production With the participation of the Province of British Columbia Production Services Tax Credit, the Canadian Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit

Executive Producers

Ravi Mehta
Kevin Messick
Jessica Elbaum
Steven Mnuchin

Cast

Will Ferrell
James King
Kevin Hart
Darnell Lewis
Tip 'T.I.' Harris
Russell
Alison Brie
Alissa

Craig T. Nelson

Martin

Edwina Findley

Rita

Ariana Neal

Makayla

Erick Chavarria

Cecelio

Paul Ben-Victor

Gayle

John Mayer

himself

Dolby Digital/

Datasat

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures
International (UK)

Los Angeles, the present. White hedge-fund manager James King is set up by his prospective father-in-law Martin to take the rap for corporate crimes; James is sentenced to ten years in San Quentin. In a panic, he enlists his car-wash attendant Darnell to teach him how to survive in jail, under the mistaken assumption that Darnell – who is black – has served time. Darnell agrees to help in exchange for \$30,000, which he plans to use to buy a house in a better neighbourhood. James goes along with Darnell's training, which involves transforming his house into a replica of a maximum-

security prison, but he struggles to apply the lessons. Darnell asks his friend Russell, who runs the Crenshaw Kings gang, to offer James protection in jail; Russell refers him to a group of neo-Nazis, who nearly kill James before Darnell intervenes. After attempting to help James clear his name, Darnell is outed as a fraud; he shows up at Russell's place to find that James is about to commit a murder in order to join the Crenshaw Kings. Darnell talks him out of it, and instead they join forces to take down Martin, who is trying to flee on his yacht. James wins his freedom; he and Darnell remain friends.

Girlhood

France 2014
Director: Céline Sciamma
Certificate 15 113m 25s



Reviewed by Sue Harris

French writer-director Céline Sciamma's latest exploration of young female identity (following *Water Lilies*, 2007, and *Tomboy*, 2011) has been

released with the international title *Girlhood*. This cookie-cutter title, while great for distribution, does a great disservice to a film that is much more defiant and unsettling than Richard Linklater's subtle meditation on middle-class American suburban boyhood. This is no quietly incremental coming-of-age narrative, but a brash, at times distressing series of snapshots of the life of undereducated black working-class girls on the bottom rung of every social and economic ladder.

Marieme and her friends are feisty, sassy, sometimes scary girls – beautiful, smart, funny young women, whose potential is always in inverse proportion to the opportunities open to them. They are girls whose lives and spirit are painfully held in check by the unspoken rules of flawed authority figures: uninterested teachers, absent mothers, big brothers, macho boys and petty bosses. Their only defence – and the film stresses that it can only ever be a temporary refuge – is the aggressive solidarity of the *bande de filles*, or girl gang; the kind of antisocial, mouthy group you wouldn't want to meet on a métro platform late at night. Less girlhood than girls-in-the-hood, the film has a lot in common with Mathieu Kassovitz's blistering *La Haine* (1995), alternating in the same way between anger, frustration and hope, but without that film's narrative reliance on macho props and posturing.

The opening moments of the film set the tone for how the energies of Marieme and girls like her are constrained by the world they inhabit: a bruising game of American football is under way, the participants dressed like modern gladiators, their hard bodies armoured with padded shoulders, helmets and faceguards. They roar as they play, deafening us with yelling that segues into jubilant laughter as the game ends and the helmets come off. Then these mighty combatants are revealed to be two teams of young women, energetic girls of every shape and size, revelling in the joy of their own strength. The noise continues in the form of raucous chatter as, high on adrenaline, they walk back in groups to their estate. But the closer they get to home, the quieter they become; nearing a group of boys hanging out on their path, they lower both their volume and their heads, and suddenly the night is over. They peel off one by one from the group, intimidated, obedient, newly vulnerable, and return to their separate homes individually and in silence. It's a sobering and impressively effective demonstration of the place of these girls in a world of intense social pressures, and of the liberating potential of female solidarity if only it can be allowed to take root.

This potential is seen in all its glory in a number of set pieces once the film has united Marieme (now renamed Vic) with the stylish and super-confident trio Lady, Adiatou and Fily. The first takes place in a hotel room in Paris where the girls, on the back of a shoplifting spree, hole up for a night of pizza and partying. Sprawling over the massive bed in a huddle of long



Sisterhood: Karidja Touré

limbs and hair, the girls colonise every inch of a space that is theirs and theirs alone for the duration of the night. Like kids left alone with a dressing-up box, they do each other's makeup and try out the clingy dresses they have acquired, and dance and sing and strut for no one's pleasure but their own. For one night only they are the stars of their own story, lip-synching to Rihanna's 'Diamonds' as if born to perform. Later, in an outdoor scene at La Défense, they dance for the pleasure of an impromptu audience of other girls, delighting in the sheer beauty and energy of their own bodies. To see these same bodies stilled elsewhere in the film by violence and taboo is thus all the more agonising, whatever

crimes and actions the girls may be guilty of.

The film's four main actresses were all non-professionals, scouted by Sciamma's team in open casting calls in the shopping malls, train stations and working-class suburbs of Paris. Karidja Touré in particular is a revelation: Marieme/Vic appears in every scene but is always in the process of transforming herself via costume, hair and makeup, like the work-in-progress her character clearly is. Even before the film's conclusion we can be no more certain than at any other point that her identity has been definitively fixed; indeed, we can only rejoice at the near escape she has had from the fixing that society would impose on 'girls like her'. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Bénédicte Couvreur
Screenplay
Céline Sciamma
Cinematographer
Crystel Fournier
Editor
Julien Lacheray
Art Director
Thomas Grézaud
Original Music
Para One

Sound Recordist
Pierre André
Costumes
Céline Sciamma

©Hold Up Films
& Productions,
Lilies Films, Arte
France Cinéma
Production
Companies
Hold Up Films and

Lilies Films presents
in co-production with
Arte France Cinéma
With the participation
of Centre National du
Cinéma et de l'Image
Animée, Canal+,
Arte France, Ciné+
With the support
of Fonds Images
de la diversité et
de l'Acisé, Région

Île-de-France in
partnership with CNC
In association
with Pyramide
Distribution, Films
Distribution and
Arte Cofinova 9
A Hold Up Films
and Lilies Films
production in co-
production with Arte
France Cinéma, Olivier

Pere and Remi Burah

Cast
Karidja Touré
Marieme/Vic
Asa Sylla
Lady
Lindsay Karamoh
Adiatou
Marietou Touré
Fily

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

French theatrical title
Bande de filles

Paris, present day. Marieme, a 16-year-old black schoolgirl from an inner-city estate, finds herself abandoned by the education system when she fails to make satisfactory progress at school. Stuck at home with an abusive brother and a vulnerable younger sister, and without any real parental authority, she is drawn to an intimidating girl gang led by the beautiful and fearless Lady. Marieme is renamed Vic (for Victory) by her new friends, and quickly joins in with their bullying and shoplifting sprees. For a while she contemplates the idea of settling down with a local boyfriend and taking a cleaning job in the same hotel as her mother,

but ultimately she refuses these options. Following Lady's defeat by the leader of another girl gang in a vicious fight, Vic grows in confidence, and exacts a humiliating revenge on Lady's opponent. She becomes a central figure in the gang but her security at home is increasingly uncertain, and after one final night of partying with the girls, she leaves them to begin working for a drug dealer. Newly independent, she makes one last effort to return to her neighbourhood and reconcile with her family, but quickly realises the impossibility of going back to such a limited life. Determined, she walks away and sets out for an uncertain future alone.

The Goob

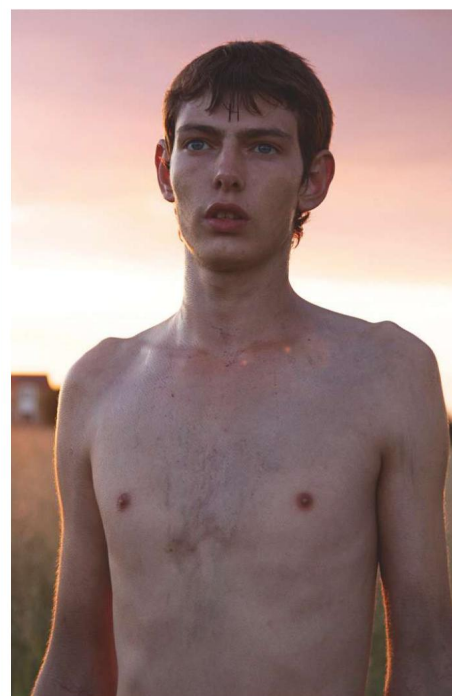
United Kingdom 2014
Director: Guy Myhill
Certificate 18 84m 32s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The Norfolk landscape comes into its own in this rites-of-passage tale marking writer-director Guy Myhill's feature debut. There's a magic-hour glow in the sky as the youthful lead glides on a moped across the farmland, the wide-open feeling of these flat vistas indicative of an adolescence poised on the verge of possibility. Liam Walpole's protagonist is still heading along the road, however, not quite free to light off on his own pathway just yet, and the same might be said for the film itself, which breathes the air of a certain expressive freedom but ultimately remains within the bounds of dramatic convention.

Known to all by his nickname Goob, Walpole's character chafes against the abrasive authority of Sean Harris's stepfather figure Womack, and discovers the intoxication of first love thanks to alluring Eva (Marama Corlett), one of the annual influx of student fruit-pickers at his mum's farming operation. These are familiar elements from many a tale of growing up, but Myhill brings enough freshness to the proceedings to suggest why his film made it through the selection process of the low-budget iFeatures scheme – shepherded by Creative England and partners from the BBC, BFI and Creative Skillset. It's not just those signature images of bikes skittering across the flatlands. Myhill also dips into the local stock-car racing scene, where the souped-up bangers trailing around a muddy circuit suggest pent-up testosterone looking for an outlet. And he deftly choreographs scenarios – the pickers' illicit night-time partying in the fields, some madly spontaneous dancing in a caff prompted by Oliver Kennedy's lively hired help Elliott – that begin to draw Goob out of himself. Newcomer Walpole is a striking presence too, a lanky lad with an intriguing faraway look in his eyes who persuasively inhabits the role of someone still hesitant about his place in the scheme of things.

Here then is a rare British film that seems to



Eastern promise: Liam Walpole

Home from Home Chronicle of a Vision

Germany/France 2014
Director: Edgar Reitz
Certificate 15 230m 44s

sing a bit more when it does away with dialogue (the unspoken tension between Goob and Elliott is delivered with genuine delicacy), which is why it disappoints when it falls back on a limited set of narrative moves. Harris seethes and struts as the bullying Womack, yet his evidently actorly craft seems to belong in a different film to Walpole's hang-loose contribution, and Myhill leans far too heavily on the evil father figure's near-psychotic excesses to keep the story moving. Sienna Guillory's underwritten role as Walpole's single mum is also a hindrance (we never understand what she sees in this pocket dictator), adding to the sense that key relationships at the heart of events are that bit sketchier than need be. In the event, cameraman Simon Tindall's captivating work makes him the star of the show, and while moments here certainly linger in the mind, what's ultimately lacking is the kind of guiding unity of purpose that made the likes of *My Summer of Love* (2004) and *Fish Tank* (2009) rather better films mining similar terrain. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Lee Groombridge Mike Elliott	Made with the support of Creative England, the BFI's Film Fund	Rosa Sean Harris Gene Womack
Written by Guy Myhill	Executive Producers Christopher Moll Steve Jenkins Christopher Collins Tristan Goligher	In Colour
Cinematographer Simon Tindall		Distributor Soda Pictures
Editor Adam Biskupski		
Production Designer Ben Myhill	Cast Liam Walpole Goob Paul Popplewell Levi	
Composer Luke Abbott	Sienna Guillory Janet, 'Mum'	
Production Sound Mixer Juan Diego Sanchez	Hannah Spearritt Mary	
Costume Designer Nigel Egerton	Paul Popplewell Levi	
	Joe Copsey Rodney	
	Oliver Kennedy Elliott	
	Marama Corlett Eva	
	Martin Ferguson Boo	
	Rosa French	
©IFeatures and The British Film Institute Production Companies Creative England, BBC Films & the BFI present an Emu Films & IFeatures production Developed with the assistance of BBC Films		

Rural Norfolk, present day. Teenager Goob is set for another summer working at his mother Janet's roadside diner and farming operation. Goob and his older brother Rod instantly dislike Janet's new boyfriend Womack, a sometime stock-car racer with an abrasive personality. They steal his prize stock car, prompting a chase during which the lads wreck the vehicle and Rod ends up in hospital. Afterwards, Womack is intent on making Goob's life a misery, building a camouflaged underground hide by the pumpkin fields so that Goob can watch over the crops by night. Janet brings in a new helper, teenager Elliott, a free spirit with sexual designs on Goob. When Womack abusively humiliates him, Elliott leaves the farm and Goob is crestfallen, though he soon finds himself falling for French girl Eva, one of the summer-jobbing fruit-pickers. Spending time with her, Goob begins to neglect his duties, and matters come to a head at Janet's end-of-season party for the fruit-pickers. Womack menaces Eva but she stands up to his sexual advances before Goob rescues her. Eva asks Goob to leave with her but he says he wants to bring his mother. Janet decides to stay with Womack and the lovers go on their way.



Breaking free: Jan Dieter Schneider

Reviewed by Jordan Cronk

Following a prolific early career consisting of shorts, features, documentaries and fictional narratives on a wide variety of themes and interests, German director and original Oberhausen Manifesto-signee Edgar Reitz reached an enviable point of international exposure with the 1984 television miniseries *Heimat: A Chronicle of Germany*. The original 11-episode, 15-hour series, set in the fictional village of Schabbach and following the life of Maria Simon and her extended family through a majority of the 20th century, was popular enough to secure Reitz's legacy as a filmmaker of uncommon ambition and cultural empathy. In the years following, *Heimat* (which translates as 'home' or 'homeland') and is accordingly of very personal investment for the director) has proven to be less a professional enterprise for its creator than a kind of artistic decree of its own. Indeed, most of the director's work since has been dedicated to the *Heimat* project; an additional 21 episodes, spread across two subsequent series and now a pair of feature films, confirming Reitz's commitment not only to elaborating on the genealogical particulars of the Simon family but also to the historical sweep of an entire epoch of modern German experience.

There are questions to be raised as to the functionality of a venture of such magnitude and particularly its necessity in a contemporary cinematic context, but they are ably answered by *Home from Home: Chronicle of a Vision*, the latest chapter in the *Heimat* saga. Set between 1840-44, almost a century before the events of the original series and thus chronologically the earliest of the instalments, *Home from Home* centres on ancestors of the Simon family living in Schabbach, a surrogate location for the Hunsrück region of West Germany where Reitz grew up.

As the film opens, Jakob Simon (Jan Dieter Schneider) is being physically reprimanded by his father Johann (Rüdiger Kries) for shirking his household duties to duck away and read adventure tales while his family toils away

in the village. Speaking in voiceover, Jakob tells of his desire to escape his prescribed lot and pursue dreams apart from the constraints of small-town life, just as his estranged sister Lena (Mélanie Fouché) did when she married a man of opposing faith. Overshadowing both is Jakob's beloved brother Gustav (Maximilian Scheidt), who returns from the front line and further endears himself to his father as a loyal confidant. The only thing that appears to be holding this dysfunctional family together is the mother, Margarethe (played by Marita Breuer of the original series), whose ill-health encourages Jakob to stay at home as he plots his future.

Shooting in widescreen black-and-white, Reitz captures a bygone approximation of his hometown in comprehensively detailed fashion, his *mise en scène* elaborately rendered in antiquated architectural designs and expansive countryside vistas. Cinematographer Gernot Roll's camera traverses the various locations with a buoyant, mobile ease, navigating cramped indoor spaces as smoothly as open-air landscapes. Pictorially, the film recalls the ambitious, large-scale productions of a bygone era of European arthouse releases, which Reitz himself helped popularise in the 1970s and 80s, and his images are accordingly picaresque and evocative. As he has done at various points in the series, Reitz drops dollops of colour at key junctures into his otherwise monochromatic compositions. At a glance these florid touches seem to have little dramatic consequence in the narrative but in each instance appear bound to the internal passions of the related characters. A gold coin, a waving red flag, a green dress, an amber sky-scraping comet: each is a manifestation of inner light in a largely dreary world. Diphtheria has spread across the land, killing many young children, including Gustav's daughter with Jettchen (the woman loved by both brothers): rather than bringing the brothers closer together, this pushes them further apart, when Gustav and Jettchen decide to migrate to Rio de Janeiro and leave their families behind. **➔**

Nearly four hours long, *Home from Home* may seem to risk not appealing to anyone unfamiliar with the greater *Heimat* legend. But what has granted the series such longevity is its mostly autonomous chronology – one need not be versed in prior instalments to view and appreciate Reitz's latest. Along with co-screenwriter Gert Heidenreich, the director has sketched and staged an intimate tale of fraternal and familial intrigue on a vast canvas, and its pleasures are appropriately felt both viscerally and emotionally. A centrepiece sequence set at a large renaissance-like fair, for example, brings together multiple parties and orchestrates the ensuing drama like an ill-fated literary farce, while knowing gestures such as the primary pigments, cosmic correspondences and cinematic allusions (including a late cameo by none other than Werner Herzog) add to the film's omnivorous constitution. It's enough to suggest that Reitz, now in his eighties, retains not only a reserve of creativity but perhaps also the generosity to one day add again to his most fruitful of chronicles. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Christian Reitz	Communication (Centre National de Cinéma et de l'image animée), ARTE France, Ciné+ Supported by DFFF, Eurimages, FFF FilmFernsehFonds Bayern, FFA Filmförderung- sanstalt Berlin, BKM, ARTE Grand Accord, Minitraité Rheinland Pfalz MWKEL A film by Edgar Reitz In co-operation with Ciné+	Black & White [2.35:1] Subtitles
Screenplay Edgar Reitz Gert Heidenreich		Distributor Curzon Film World
Cinematography Gernot Roll Michael Praun		German theatrical title Die andere Heimat Chronik einer Sehnsucht
Editor Uwe Klimmeck		
Production Design Toni Gerg Hucky Hornberger		
Music Michael Riessler		
Sound Marc Parisotto Philippe Welsh Étienne Haug		
Costume Design Esther Amuser		
Production Companies Günter Rohrbach presents a ERF Edgar Reitz Filmproduktion und Les Films du Losange co-production with Degeto, BR/ WDR/ARTE With the participation of Ministère de la Culture et de la	Cast Jan Dieter Schneider Jakob Simon Antonia Bell Jettchen Niem Maximilian Scheidt Gustav Simon Marita Breuer Margrethe Simon Rüdiger Kriese Johann Simon Phillip Lembeck Florinchen Morsch	
	Dolby Digital In Colour and	

Germany, 1840, the fictional village of Schabbach. Jakob, an idealistic young man with dreams of leaving the small town, lives with his working-class family, including stern father Johann and mother Margarethe. Much loved by her children, Margarethe is dying of lung disease. When Jakob's eldest sibling Gustav returns home from war, the two brothers compete not only for the approval of their parents but also for the love of local girl Jettchen, who eventually marries Gustav when she becomes pregnant. Over the course of four years the brothers fight each other, the other villagers, law enforcement and their extended family.

When an outbreak of diphtheria strikes the countryside, claiming the life of their daughter, Gustav and Jettchen decide to organise a mass emigration to Brazil, forcing Jakob to attend to his mother's needs and temporarily set aside his ambitions.

Honeytrap

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Rebecca Johnson
Certificate 18 97m 31s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

It's certainly a familiar trajectory, the slightly naive new kid in town who just wants to fit in but is soon mixing with the wrong company. However, this South London retelling of a youth-pic staple is graced with a degree of sensitivity in writing and performance, and comes up fresh despite the well-worn material.

Much of this is due to the relative novelty of exploring the terrain from a young female perspective, and also the strong impression made by Jessica Sula in the central role of 15-year-old Layla, who arrives to stay with her estranged mum Shiree in Brixton, having spent the past decade with maternal grandparents in Trinidad. Shiree seems to view her presence as an inconvenience rather than a chance to make up for lost time, and the poor girl's dowdy clothes and generally shy demeanour are initially so out of sync with her new surroundings that we're immediately fearful for her. This effective set-up allows Sula to establish the tone for her performance, since however much she dresses in her mum's borrowed clothes and gives it plenty of attitude to impress her newfound social group, we still sense the unformed, hesitant innocent behind the bravado. Here 20-year-old Sula's child-woman physicality and her open, trusting features make her spot-on casting in the role, right down to her own Trinidadian roots coming through in the accent, adding another element to the character's outsider status.

The relationship between Layla and Naomi Ryan's Shiree exemplifies the skilled portraiture in director Rebecca Johnson's screenplay. We can sense the older woman's efforts to hold on to her own youth being stymied by the sudden presence of her teenage daughter, but at the same time we feel there's an emotional hardness about Shiree that speaks of bitter life experience. The way mother and daughter talk around the troubling issue of the Trinidadian grandpa's apparently sexually abusive tendencies, hinting at troubling deeds that neither is quite ready



Dirty trick: Lucien Laviscount, Jessica Sula

to confront head-on, is also deftly handled, suggesting the source of the vulnerability and the submissive desire to please that both Layla and Shiree manifest in the course of the story.

When these two are on screen the film really sings, but unfortunately Johnson seems to have less skill or empathy with the somewhat hackneyed male characters. The plot ramps up the animosity between Layla's very different suitors – Lucien Laviscount's gangster/rapper Troy and Ntonga Mwanza's nice-guy Shaun – yet the evident bad blood between the rivals is too fuzzily outlined to make the story's escalating violence terribly credible. That's the film's ultimate undoing, as its final reel rather perfunctorily delivers the cautionary note of many a youth-oriented urban drama. Still, there's enough accomplishment and insight on show here to suggest that Johnson has definite promise, and Sula is certainly another find from Channel 4's *Skins*, a veritable academy of teenage acting talent, having already sent us Jack O'Connell, Dev Patel and Nicholas Hoult. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Sarah Sulick Amy Ricker	Developed with the support of the BFI's Film Fund, BFI National Lottery - Film Forever	Laetitia Tosin Cole Andre
Written by Rebecca Johnson	Executive Producers Esther Douglas Laurie Holden Patrick Fischer Rebecca Johnson Roger Goldby Stanley Myint Will Wood	Jerome Holder Nathan Daniel Bertrand Tiny
Director of Photography Annemarie Lean-Vercor		In Colour
Editor John Dwelly		Distributor Anchor Bay Entertainment UK Ltd
Production Designer Ana Viana		
Music Francis Binns		
Sound Recordist Keith Tunney		
Costume Designer Mollie Barr		
Cast Jessica Sula Layla Lucien Laviscount Troy Ntonga Mwanza Shaun Naomi Ryan Shiree Danielle Vitalis Tonisha Lauren Johns Jade Savannah Gordon-Liburd		
Production Companies Bright Pictures & Finite Films present in association with Creativity Capital & Fierce Productions a film by Rebecca Johnson		

Brixton, London, present day. Fifteen-year-old Layla arrives to stay with her mother Shiree, who left her with grandparents in Trinidad ten years ago. Shiree is far from welcoming, and her failure to provide proper documentation means that Layla loses her place at the local comprehensive and instead has to attend a centre for disruptive pupils. Layla soon falls under the sway of streetwise schoolfriends Tonisha and Jade, who inveigle her into shoplifting clothes. The three girls attend a video shoot for a local rap posse, and Tonisha and Jade are annoyed when rapper Troy picks Layla out to dance with him on camera. Smitten, Layla loses her virginity to Troy, preferring him to the more sensitive and sensible Shaun, who is despised by Troy's gang for shunning their criminal activities. Layla's discovery that she is not Troy's only girlfriend prompts a fracas with two aggressive female neighbours and leaves Layla in hospital after she half-heartedly throws herself into the traffic. Shaun provides support while she recovers from a leg fracture. When Troy learns that Layla is still in contact with Shaun, he pressures her to lure the latter into an ambush. Shaun registers Layla's betrayal before Troy fatally stabs him. Layla later breaks down when the police arrive at her home; Shiree holds her hand en route to the station.

Lambert & Stamp

USA 2014
Director: James D. Cooper
Certificate 15 117m 23s

Reviewed by Sam Davies

With the field of 1960s pop music now so thoroughly traversed by documentary makers that even The Beatles' secretary Freda Kelly has been the subject of a cinematic study (*Good Ol' Freda*, 2013), the appearance of a film about a pair of rock-group managers can't help but have an air of, if not barrel-scrapping, then certainly déjà vu. Its perfunctory title does little to entice either, sounding vaguely like a knock-off cigarette brand. But *Lambert & Stamp*, director James D. Cooper's first feature, does more than just make the case for The Who's first managers as figures of interest. It's also an odd-couple romance, a tapping of underground currents in the development of British pop culture and a study in unintended consequences.

Kit Lambert, product of Lancing College and Oxford, and Chris Stamp, son of an East End tugboat captain, were never the most obvious partnership. But when they met in London in the 1960s they had in common a love of the French New Wave, an interest in the energy of youth culture – and soon a plan to make the jump up from their lives as jobbing assistant directors: find a band, take them in hand, and make a film about the process as their cinematic calling card. The film never materialised; instead The Who, and their platinum-selling career, turned out to be Lambert and Stamp's accidental artwork.

At first the group – as surviving members Roger Daltrey and Pete Townshend admit – were virtually the creative juniors in the working relationship. It takes some time within the film to establish what exactly Lambert and Stamp contributed that so dazzled the band. Like a refrain, we are told that the would-be directors planned to film everything, but we hear little else past this Warholian proto-reality-TV project. Cooper is at times guilty of telling the story of The Who rather than rigorously focusing on Lambert and Stamp's role in it. But gradually, their ideas begin to flicker through. Lambert, son of composer Constant Lambert, introduces Townshend to the classical canon and the possibility of sequencing three-minute pop songs as part of an overarching structure. Townshend responds by pinching chords from Purcell and arranging rock operas.

"It felt like we were actors in his play," explains Townshend, attesting not only to Lambert's obvious magnetism but also to his innate genius for the theatrical flourish. Cooper's approach (all interviews and archival footage, no explanatory subtitles or narration) means that the exact provenance of some sequences isn't clear, though elements from Lambert and Stamp's unfinished film projects are used throughout. At one point Lambert is shown holding court at a press conference to launch Track Records (through which he and Stamp released records by Hendrix, Thunderclap Newman and others). Lambert pours Teacher's into teacups for the assembled hacks and fields a query from a company secretary about a missing guitar – the cutaway shot to the secretary gives away the staging at work in this not-quite-candid interruption. What Cooper's film reveals, implicitly, is that while Lambert and Stamp are easily filed alongside contemporaries such as Brian Epstein (The Beatles) or Peter Grant



Seeing for miles: Kit Lambert, Chris Stamp

(Led Zeppelin), they were also prototypes for a very British pop figure: a combination of hustler, prankster, showman and visionary, mixing art-school conceptualism, cheek and a sizeable dose of raw cunning, the kind of figure represented by Malcolm McLaren (Sex Pistols), Tony Wilson (Factory Records) or Bill Drummond (The KLF).

Class plays a fascinating role in the story. Daltrey: "I wouldn't say Kit was the only posh person I'd spoken to, but he was the only one interested in what I said." Lambert reveals to Stamp, Townshend et al the great confidence-

trick of the upper classes (have plenty of it), as well as more pragmatic tips: the magical effect on one's credit rating that an Eaton Place address provides, the doors that fall open before a Coutts cheque book. A blizzard of overdrafts and shamelessly unpaid accounts finances The Who's path to success. The sheer chutzpah of the posh has an unappreciated importance to what, in punk, seems to be DIY revolt (see diplomat's son Joe Strummer of The Clash). In this sense, Lambert is part of a through-line from punk and mod's proletarian fury to the boarding-school insurrection of Lindsay Anderson's *If...* (1968) and perhaps even the Cambridge Five. (Lambert and Stamp – a student of Soviet cinema – did their best to arrange a tour of Soviet opera houses for *Tommy*.)

The break-up, when it came, was typically dramatic. Relationships soured with Townshend's refusal to let Lambert and Stamp make *Tommy* their long-planned film project; and with Lambert drink-addled (and a ward of court), the band sacked the pair in a bad-tempered meeting. The venue, appropriately for Lambert and Stamp's film ambitions, was a Shepperton boardroom. But with the energy and momentum of Cooper's editing, the rolling boil of the soundtrack and the ideas quietly fizzing out of interviewees Townshend and Stamp, the film never feels like an exercise in nostalgia, or elegy. Which is remarkable given that half of The Who are now deceased, and Lambert died in 1981. It's to the credit of Cooper and his film that the lack of such key witnesses and voices is never felt too keenly. But it is also slightly jarring to realise that Chris Stamp died in 2012 – a fact unacknowledged in the film, even by a simple postscript intertitle. Such, presumably, is Cooper's determination to avoid the lazily elegiac. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
James D. Cooper
Loretta Harms
Douglas Graves

Photographed by
James D. Cooper

Editor
Christopher Tellefsen

Sound Recordists
Doug Drega

Brian Buckley

Julian Chatterjee

Roger Phenix

Steve Bowden

Mitch Low

David Moshlak

©Magic Rabbit, LLC

Production

Companies

A Motocinema,
Harms/Cooper
production
A James D.
Cooper film

Executive

Producers
Loretta Harms

Mark Mullen

Film Extracts
Battle for Music

(1943)

À bout de souffle

(1960)

vivre sa vie

film en douze

tableaux (1962)

Spirits of Dead/

Histoires

extraordinaires

(1967)

Monterey Pop (1969)

Woodstock 3

Days of Peace &

Music (1970)

Tommy (1975)

200 Motels (1971)

News from

Home (1977)

In Colour and

Black and White

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Dogwoof

A documentary about Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp, who in the 1960s become managers of West London group The High Numbers with the intention of making a film about them. Rechristened The Who, the group achieve huge success. Using interviews with Chris Stamp and surviving band members Pete Townshend and Roger Daltrey, the documentary explores the contribution of Lambert and Stamp to The Who's music and career.

Lost River

USA 2013
Director: Ryan Gosling
Certificate 15 94m 44s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

To the pink light of a neon flamingo, a doleful waif called Rat prods out a faux-Angelo Badalamenti keyboard lament, while her catatonic grandmother sits in gloom watching disintegrating wedding footage on repeat. Their neighbour Bones steals scrap metal from his nemesis, a psycho named Bully. The latter takes scissors to the lips of an errant lackey; he'll later reflect on his actions via an oblique Terrence Malick-like voiceover about the way of things.

The above may give an idea of the relentless affectation of Ryan Gosling's directorial debut, a lurid fairytale *noir* that's as disorderly as its 'imploding' titular city – a mythical stand-in for Detroit (provider of the film's desolate locations). While its recurring motifs of fire and water, outlandish netherworlds (a grand-guignol cabaret club, a submerged town), absurdist non sequiturs and brooding synthesiser washes (courtesy of Chromatics' Johnny Jewel) draw most overtly from the well of David Lynch, *Lost River* essentially shakes up an entire, unpalatable cocktail of indie auteurist tendencies. Amid the aesthetic clutter, you might detect traces of Gosling's close collaborators of recent years, Nicolas Winding Refn (stately carnage) and Derek Cianfrance (grungy *vérité*). It's also hard not to recall Harmony Korine's *Gummo* (1997) in the skewed depiction of lives on the periphery.

Gosling and his cinematographer Benoît Debie – reprising the woozy use of colour from his work with Korine (*Spring Breakers*) and Gaspar Noé (*Enter the Void, Irreversible*) – don't have any problems locating arresting imagery, even if it feels handed down. But it's all too often divested of any meaning or emotional charge. The same applies to the paper-thin characters, ciphers drawn in monolithic strokes of good and evil. With her expressive, wide-eyed face, Christina Hendricks's Billy fits the bill as a Lynchian 'woman in trouble', but she and the rest of the strong cast – Matt Smith (giving it the full Crispin Glover treatment as the deranged Bully), Saoirse Ronan, Iain De Caestecker, Eva Mendes, Ben Mendelsohn and a mute Barbara Steele – get pretty short shrift from Gosling's inane script. The notion of both Billy and her son Bones (De Caestecker) negotiating paths



Running dry: Saoirse Ronan

to contrasting underworlds in order to save their skins – for Billy, an unlikely job at the burlesque club run by Mendelsohn's sleazy bank manager Dave; for Bones, a secret route to the underwater city where he believes a curse can be broken – has promise, but both strands ultimately have fudged, unsatisfactory payoffs. There's an overreliance on grotesque set pieces and ungainly symbolism – not least in a scene where Billy channels Edith Scob by apparently peeling off her face for the club's rapt, exclusive clientele. This might be interpreted as a discarded community losing its identity to exploitative bloodsuckers, but Gosling risks fetishising – and trivialising – hardscrabble lives with his mannered approach. The crumbling Detroit locations are striking, but recent films such as Jim Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive* and David Robert Mitchell's *It Follows* have showcased the city to more potent, atmospheric effect.

It's tempting to compare *Lost River* – which was widely derided at last year's Cannes and has had a perfunctory US release – with another once maligned debut for an actor-turned-director, Charles Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), a film with similar dark fairytale stylings. Laughton, of course, never directed again; Gosling's admittedly keen visual sense is encouraging, if nothing else. Whatever the outcome, it's difficult to imagine his Midwest gothic growing in stature over time to be a celebrated *film maudit* in the same way as Laughton's brilliant one-off. Unlike Bones's mysterious underwater city, there's precious little to be salvaged from beneath the film's teeming surface. **S**

Man Up

France/United Kingdom/Luxembourg 2014
Director: Ben Palmer
Certificate 15 87m 52s

See Industry,
page 14

Reviewed by Kate Stables

For a while recently, it seemed as though the British romantic comedy was stuck in high-concept gear, with films such as *The Decoy Bride* (2011), *About Time* (2013) and *Not Another Happy Ending* (2013) pursuing a succession of zany and increasingly unlikely premises. A relief, then, to find that *Man Up* is an engagingly straightforward romcom demonstrably fond of the genre and bent on re-energising rather than reinventing it.

It's a warm and lively piece about a thirtysomething couple who meet cute when she accidentally hijacks his blind date, and moreover it's set in a recognisable London rather than the shiny, tourist-spot Curtisland that's often featured. There's more than a hint, however, of *Bridget Jones's Diary* in its cheerfully hungover journalist heroine Nancy, addicted to sarcasm, self-talk and lists of planned self-improvements. Particularly since she's played by the American actress Lake Bell, complete with a pitch-perfect English accent (Bell's 2013 directorial debut *In a World...* also showed off her vocal mimicry). Bell, cast repeatedly as the feisty best friend in US romcoms such as *What Happens in Vegas* and *No Strings Attached*, brings a lanky, self-deprecating charm out to play. She's a classy, offbeat choice in a genre whose stars have dimmed of late. As *The Atlantic* observed, it's been a "long decline from Katharine Hepburn to Katherine Heigl".

Opposite Bell, Simon Pegg as divorcee Jack delivers one of his trademark bruised-but-affable, easily embarrassed everymen. A canny choice to attract the male audience traditionally resistant to this kind of stuff, he's at his nervy best conducting the panicked, pell-mell search for Nancy that drives the back-end of the narrative, though viewers expecting Cornetto Trilogy-style broad comic spoofing will leave disappointed. *Man Up* is structured as a straight-up screwball comedy, its farce sprinkled with slapstick (a fire-extinguisher mess-up, a battle-of-the-sexes race through Soho), varied with the kind of feigned-cool, teasing exchanges that the British use for flirtation. Kick-starting the plot with the venerable 'female imposter' conceit (as used by films from *The Lady Eve* to *While You Were Sleeping*), the narrative lets the angry discovery of Nancy's trick keep the couple apart naturally, rather than through plot contortions.

Overall, director Ben Palmer opts for a good-natured mood and a naturalistic visual style, keeping things more relaxed than the frenetic gross-out comedy of his *Inbetweeners* films. Not everything takes, however. Rory Kinnear's inclusion as the schoolmate threatening to unmask Nancy feels like a sitcom device, and his bug-eyed, slightly manic performance jars with the otherwise jaunty realism of the piece. The periodic cutaways to Nancy's parents, played as warm, long-suffering ciphers, seem a waste of the considerable talents of Harriet Walter and Ken Stott to boot.

Commendably, the spy script from first-time screenwriter Tess Morris staunchly refuses to pigeonhole its heroine as a lovelorn failure, driven career girl or 'friend with benefits'. The dialogue, which gifts Nancy with the best gags, has the requisite mix of silliness and sophistication, and

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Marc Platt
Ryan Gosling
Adam Siegel
Michel Litvak
David Lancaster
Written by
Ryan Gosling
Director of Photography
Benoît Debie
Film Editors
Valdis Oskarsdóttir

Nico Leunen

Production Designer
Beth Mickle
Music
Johnny Jewel
Sound Design/Supervision
Lon Bender
Costume Designer
Erin Benach
©Bold Films
Productions, LLC.

Production Companies

Bold Films presents
a Marc Platt/
Phantasma Films
production
A film by Ryan Gosling
Executive Producers
Gary Michael Walters
Noaz Deshe
Jeffrey Stott

Cast

Christina Hendricks
Billy
Saoirse Ronan
Rat
Iain De Caestecker
Bones
Matt Smith
Bully
Reda Katab
cab driver
Barbara Steele
Grandma

Eva Mendes

Cat
Ben Mendelsohn
Dave
Shannon Plumb
Fanny
Landyn Joseph
Stewart
Franky
Rob Zabrecky
MC
Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor
E1 Films

US, present day. Struggling to maintain mortgage payments on her house in the abandoned town of *Lost River*, single mother Billy takes a job at a macabre nightclub owned by sleazy bank manager Dave. Hoping to raise enough cash for the family to leave town, Billy's eldest son Bones incurs the wrath of psychopath Bully when he steals some scrap metal. Bones discovers a hidden road leading to a reservoir, under which is a submerged city. Bones's

neighbour Rat – whose catatonic grandmother lost her husband in floods – insists that a curse hangs over the town, and believes that the key to lifting it lies underwater. Billy rebuffs the advances of Dave. Bully has Rat's house burnt down, with her grandmother inside. Bones retrieves a dinosaur head from the sunken city, using it to send Bully to his death in a car wreck. Billy stabs Dave when he attempts to rape her. Billy, her sons and Rat leave town.

The Man Who Saved the World

Denmark/Sweden/Norway/Latvia/USA/Germany/The Netherlands 2014
Director: Peter Anthony



Absence and sensibility: Simon Pegg, Lake Bell

Bell works it skilfully. Watching her spin out a flirtatious theory on how relationship sex declines like movie certificates – from the experimental 18 to the near-platonic PG – she's a giddy delight. Yet even a movie this smart and self-aware can't close without the last-minute romantic dash and big public declaration of love, which appear to be almost legal requirements for British romcoms. A case of 'give 'em enough trope', perhaps. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Nira Park
James Biddle

Rachael Prior

Written by

Tess Morris

Director of

Photography

Andrew Dunn

Editor

Paul Machliss

Production

Designer

Dick Lunn

Music

Dickon Hinchliffe

Supervising

Sound Designer

Jeremy Price

Costume Designer

Suzie Harman

©Studiocanal

Limited/British

Broadcasting

Corporation

Production

Companies

Studiocanal and

BBC Films present

a Big Talk Pictures

production

In association

with Antoon Capital

Entertainment,

Studiocanal, Amazon

Prime Instant

Video, BBC Films

Executive

Producers

Matthew Justice

Simon Pegg

Dan Cheesbrough

Jenny Borgars

Danny Perkins

Christine Langan

Joe Oppenheimer

Film Extracts

The Silence of the

Lambs (1990)

Cast

Lake Bell

Nancy

Simon Pegg

Jack

Rory Kinnear

Sean

Ken Stott

Bert

Harriet Walter

Fran

Olivia Williams

Hilary

Sharon Horgan

Elaine

Ophelia Lovibond

Jessica

Stephen

Campbell-Moore

Ed

In Colour

Distributor

Studiocanal Limited

London, present day. Thirtysomething Nancy endures a bad blind date at an engagement party. By the clock at Waterloo Station, divorced Jack mistakes Nancy for his blind date Jessica. Nancy goes along with it, and they hit it off. On the date, Nancy is recognised by a waiter, her stalker schoolfriend Sean. He blackmails her into kissing him in the ladies' toilet. Discovered by an angry Jack, Nancy confesses to her deception. When they bump into Jack's ex-wife and her new partner in a bar, Nancy masquerades as Jack's girlfriend to make him look good, as he isn't fully over his marriage break-up. Nancy leaves for her parents' anniversary party, without exchanging contact details. The real Jessica phones Jack. They have a short, stilted date. To track Nancy down, Jack finds Sean and persuades him to drive to her parent's home. Sean tricks him, however, dropping him off at a teen party. A sad Nancy is comforted by her family. A teen partygoer for whom Nancy used to babysit takes Jack to the right house. Jack gatecrashes the party and makes an emotional public speech about having missed his chance with Nancy. He and Nancy reconcile.

Reviewed by Jason Anderson

There are many instances of sincere genuflection in this curious doc-fiction hybrid from Danish director Peter Anthony, but the most effusive may also be the strangest. "I didn't dare dream about meeting you but then this opportunity arose," says one of the film's key subjects to another luminary. "I happen to be a great fan of your talents. They shine beyond the realm of the ordinary and stand out from the rest." Clearly sheepish to find himself in the presence of such greatness, the speaker pauses before adding, "You're pretty famous in Russia."

Though one might expect the recipient of such flattery to be the person referenced in the title of *The Man Who Saved the World*, the one who does the basking is Kevin Costner. Indeed, a personal meeting with the actor was the primary inspiration for the odyssey undertaken by the film's subject, a crusty Muscovite retiree named Stanislav Petrov, who did in fact avert the outbreak of World War III in 1983 when he rightly judged an apparent missile strike by the US to be a false alarm.

Petrov has already spoken at the UN and met Robert De Niro at the start of the travels depicted here. (He also meets Matt Damon but has no idea who he is and presumes the 'boy' must be De Niro's son.) The quest to meet Costner was prompted by a letter the actor wrote to Petrov after learning of his heroism from an episode of the NBC show *Dateline*. And though Anthony's film is often admirably direct about its pro-disarmament agenda – especially timely given the nuclear aspirations of many nations and the renewal of tensions between the Cold War's old adversaries – its preoccupation with celebrities can be as off-putting as the director's more problematic efforts to muddy any distinctions between narrative film and documentary.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Jakob Staberg

Written by

Peter Anthony

Directors of

Photography

Anders Löfstedt

Kim Hattsen

Edited by

Morten Højberg

Set Designs

Jurgis Krasons

Music

Kristian Eidnes

Andersen

Sound Design

Peter Schultz

Costume Designer

Liga Krasone

©Statement Film

Production

Companies

Statement Film

presents with the

support of Danish

Film Institute,

Swedish Film

Institute, Norwegian

Film- and TV-Fund a

film by Peter Anthony

Co-produced by

Kong Gulerod Film,

Slowmotion FX, Ego

Media/WG Film

Co-producers:

Mainstream, Cosmo

Tone ApS, Hydralab,

Fredrik Gertten,

Intense Studio,

Cosmo Tone

Produced with the

support of Danish

Film Institute,

Swedish Film

Institute, Norwegian

Film- and TV-Fund,

Riga Film Fund,

Pools and Lottery

Funds of the Danish

Ministry of Children

and Education,

International

Physicians for

the Prevention of

Nuclear War

Produced in

association with ZDF/

Arte, SVT, VPRO, NRK

Produced in

collaboration

with DR Sales

Executive Producers

Jakob Staberg

Peter Anthony

Christian D. Brunn

Mark Romeo

Raphael Avigdor

Cast

Stanislav Petrov

Galina Kalinina

themselves

Sergey Shnyryov

Lieutenant Colonel

Stanislav Petrov

Nataliya Vdovina

Petrov's wife

Oleg Kassim

Major Orlov

Walter Cronkite

Robert De Niro

Matt Damon

Ashton Kutcher

themselves

Kevin Sanders

reporter

Igor Filipov

main control

operative

Vilis Daudzins

main control

operative, visual

channel

Girts Jakovlevs

Colonel General

Votintsev

Igors Chernavskis

assistant to main

control operative,

space apparatus

Mihails Karasikovs

algorithmic specialist,

calculation centre

Rodions Kuzmins

visual channel

operator

Kevin Costner

himself

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Kaleidoscope Film

Distribution

Petrov and his translator Galina Kalinina then embark on a journey to Louisiana to visit the actor Kevin Costner, who has invited Petrov to meet with him after hearing of his story. During their journey, Galina learns of the reasons for Petrov's decline into alcoholism, including his estrangement from his mother and the death of his wife. Petrov is thrilled to meet Costner, who praises Petrov's heroism.

Returning to Russia, Petrov reconciles with his mother.

Moomins on the Riviera

Finland/France/Denmark/Norway/Sweden 2014
 Director: Xavier Picard
 Certificate U 76m 58s

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

The Moomins conclude, as Dorothy did, that “there’s no place like home” in this hand-drawn animation adventure featuring the Finnish-created family of trolls who, Moominpappa ratifies, are “not in any way related to hippopotami”.

Visually equal, in character and colour scale, to Tove Jansson’s original comic-strips, the film is let down by its English-language voice cast, whose performances lack richness. One wishes the dubbed film had had the clout to attract more eminent artists. (By contrast, two earlier Filmkompaniet-produced stop-motion animation films corralled famous Scandinavian actors including Stellan Skarsgård, and even had an original song by Björk.)

Like short, daisy-chained episodes of a children’s TV series, this latest adaptation giddily tacks from theme to theme, and feels long at 80 minutes. There are, however, some lovely flourishes, such as the unexpectedness of one character, White Shadow, asking his cousin-double to “take [his] place in the story” so that he may decamp to be married, and aural details such as ducks dispersing at fireworks. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Co-director

Hanna Hemilä

Producer

Hanna Hemilä

Screenplay

Leslie Stewart

Annina Enckell

Hanna Hemilä

Xavier Picard

Beata Harju

Based on Tove

Jansson’s books

Moomin, the

Complete Tove

Jansson Comic Strip

Editor

Thomas Belair

Music

Milja Vilijamaa

Anna-Karin

Korhonen

Panu Aaltio

Timo Lassy

Supervising

Sound Editor

Joonas Jyrälä

Animation

Supervisors

Jean-Christophe

Roger

Olivier Carval

©Handle

Productions Oy,

Pictak Cie

Production

Companies

Produced by

Handle Productions

Oy, Pictak Cie

in participation

with Moomin

Characters, Finnish

Film Foundation,

Nordisk Film, YLE,

Nordic Film & TV

Fund, Svenska

Kulturfonden,

Indie Sales, MEDIA

Programme of

the European

Union, Föreningen

Konstamfundet,

Svenska

Folkskolans Vänner,

Gébeka Films

Voice Cast

Russell Tovey

Moomin

Tracy Ann Oberman

Moominmamma

Nathaniel Parker

Moominpappa

Stephanie Winiacki

Snorkmaiden

Ruth Gibson

Little My

Philippe

Smolikowski

Marquis Mongaga

Dave Browne

Clark Tresco

Shelley Blond

Audrey Glamour

Dominic Frisby

Snufkin

Alison O'Donnell

Mymble

In Colour

[L85:1]

Distributor

Vertigo Films

Finnish theatrical

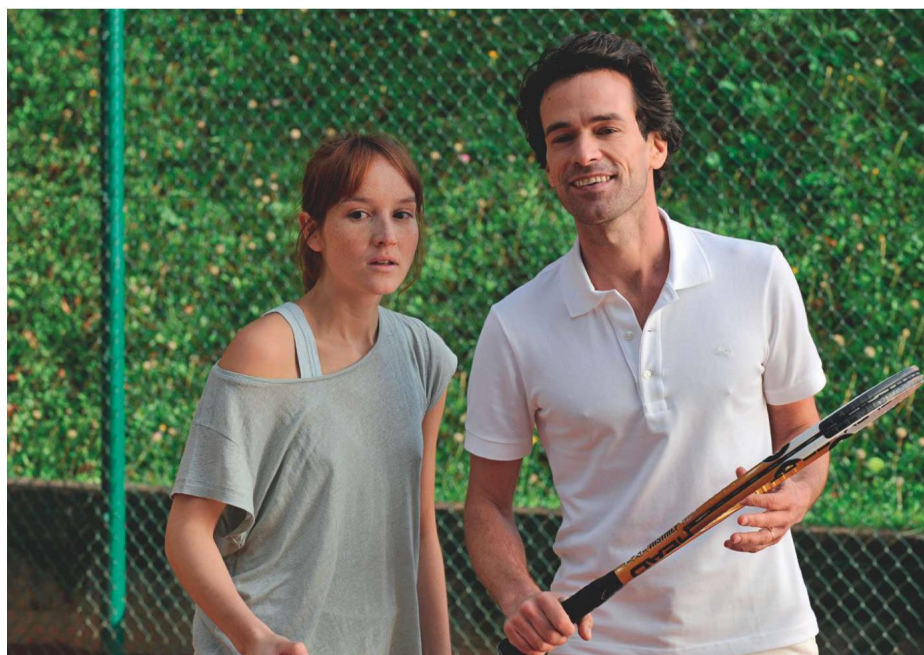
title

Muumit Rivieralla

The Moomins leave Moominvalley and sail with friends Snorkmaiden and Little My to the French Riviera, where they check into the royal suite of a smart hotel, unaware of the cost. Moominpappa, giving their name as ‘de Moomin’, is befriended by the Marquis Mongaga, who delights in the company of bohemians. Embraced by the jet set, Snorkmaiden catches the eye of wealthy playboy Clark; Moomintroll grows jealous and dejected. Spurning high society, Moominmamma and Moomintroll vacate the hotel and instead camp under their sailboat on the beach. Snorkmaiden’s affections resettle on Moomintroll after he emerges the victor in a duel with Clark. Having paid the exorbitant hotel bill with Snorkmaiden’s roulette winnings, the family are chased from the resort when the mayor links Moominpappa to a case of civic vandalism. The family set sail for Moominvalley, and are much relieved to reach home.

The New Girlfriend

France 2014
 Director: François Ozon



Love match: Anaïs Demoustier, Romain Duris



Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

The trailer for *The New Girlfriend* works hard to keep its central twist under wraps. No such coyness in this review; in any case, one wonders whether the secretive strategy isn’t somewhat self-defeating, passing off as a straight-down-the-line marital thriller a film that is in fact altogether more queer, in all senses of the word, and all the better for it.

Loosely adapted from a tale by Ruth Rendell, the film opens with an abbreviated love story of sorts, as over ten dialogue-free minutes we see best friends Laura (Isild Le Besco) and Claire (Anaïs Demoustier) undergo a *coup de foudre*, carve their initials into trees, swap blood and boyfriends and finally marry their respective partners. Shortly

after giving birth to a girl, though, Laura dies, and Claire is left to care for her grieving husband David (Romain Duris)—a task made all the more tricky for Claire with the big revelation, as the film opens in earnest, that David likes to dress as a woman. “You’re a perv!” she cries, distraught.

A vulnerable David begs tolerance, and before long Claire is meeting his alter ego Virginia (the name drips metaphorical significance) for secret trysts, while the film, bending genres and genders, segues into a slippery, suggestive exploration of sexual identity and desire redolent of Pedro Almodóvar. The cross-dressing set-up seems to herald a screwball comedy of sorts, and sure enough we see the occasional joke at Virginia’s expense, or at least at Duris’s. But director François Ozon and his actors are too smart to play the scenario for mere laughs. Instead, the film is full of ambivalence and ambiguity. Even Claire’s

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Eric Altmayer

Nicolas Altmayer

Screenplay

François Ozon

Freely adapted from

The New Girlfriend

by Ruth Rendell

Director of

Photography

Pascal Marti

Editor

Laure Gardette

Art Director

Michel Barthélémy

Original Music

Philippe Rombi

Sound

Guillaume Sciama

Benoît Hillebrant

Jean-Paul Hurier

Costume Designer

Pascaline Chavanne

©Mandarin Cinéma,

Mars Films, France

2 Cinéma, Foz

Production

Companies

Mandarin Cinéma

& Foz presents

in co-production

with Mars Films,

France 2 Cinéma

with the participation

of Canal+, Ciné+,

France Télévisions

in association with

Manon 4, Banque

Postale Image

7, Cofimage 25,

Cinéma 8

a Mandarin Cinéma,

Foz co-production

Film Extracts

Waterloo Bridge

(1940)

Cast

Romain Duris

David/Virginia

Anaïs Demoustier

Claire

Raphaël Personnaz

Gilles

Isild Le Besco

Laura

Aurore Clément

Liz

Brune Kalnykow

Lucie aged 7

In Colour

[L85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Metrodome

Distribution Ltd

French theatrical title

Une nouvelle amie

France, the present. When Claire’s best friend Laura dies, Claire vows to take care of her husband David and infant daughter Lucie. On her first visit, Claire finds David wearing Laura’s clothes. He admits that he has a longstanding compulsion to dress as a woman, which Laura knew about. Claire is horrified but intrigued, and she begins to spend time with ‘Virginia’, David’s female alter ego. She tells her husband Gilles that David is gay after he becomes suspicious of their relationship. During a tennis match arranged by Gilles, Claire confesses to David that she misses Virginia

and the pair kiss. They arrange to meet at a hotel and go to bed together; however, Claire takes fright at the sight of Virginia’s penis and flees. Distraught, Virginia runs out of the hotel and into oncoming traffic. David’s in-laws call Claire to tell her he is in a coma. Claire and Gilles care for Lucie, and Claire visits David in hospital daily. It is only when Lucie dresses David as a woman and calls him Virginia that s/he finally awakes. The pair tell Gilles the truth.

Seven years later, Virginia and a pregnant Claire collect Lucie from school.

Paul Blart Mall Cop 2

USA 2015
Director: Andy Fickman
Certificate PG 93m 43s

apparently super-hetero husband Gilles (Raphaël Personnaz) isn't averse to borrowing the odd item of his wife's clothing. For his part, David asserts that he's not gay, telling Claire, "Women turn me on. That's why I wanted to be one."

And what a woman he becomes. Duris has long been slithery and sinuous and sexy in a strange, Mick Jagger way: hardly a classic romantic lead, though he continues to be cast as such. It's strange, then, that it's taken until now (his uproarious interpretation of Demy's *Lola* in Christophe Honoré's *17 fois Cécile Cassard* notwithstanding) for a director to tease out this latent hermaphroditism. His Virginia is mesmerising, the living embodiment of that peculiarly French expression *jolie-laide*. His version of womanhood begins as a performance of excessive femininity, all 50s floral frocks, huge blonde wigs and simpering, Marilyn-esque whisper. Everything is pink, pink, pink, until gradually s/he softens into something far more credible, and pinks become reds and finally burgundies.

It's to Demoustier's credit that in the face of such showboating, Claire emerges as the more intriguing of the two characters: more repressed and riven with doubt, her eventual arrival at a point of self-acceptance harder won. She has the look of a young Isabelle Huppert (indeed, she played Huppert's daughter in Michael Haneke's *Time of the Wolf*) and the same quality of innocence mixed with malevolence. In early scenes her clothes – suits, shirts, dark structured coats – cast her as boyish, and it would be easy to say that the relationship with Virginia brings out the woman in her too, from the dresses that start to appear in her wardrobe to her final fecundity. But that would be falling into the very binaries that Ozon sets out to trouble, and as one sex scene makes judderingly clear, Claire isn't above taking a more masculine role in the bedroom.

The understated eloquence of both Claire's and Virginia's costumes is typical of the craft that runs through the film, from Phillipe Rombi's melodramatic score through Gill Robillard's impeccably off-kilter makeup to Michel Barthélémy's hyperreal sets. All these aspects – combined with Pascal Marti's eerie, beautiful camerawork – lend the whole a fairytale atmosphere, at once sweet and sinister. Awash with dream sequences and fantasies, *The New Girlfriend* is never quite clear about what's real and what's twisted wish-fulfilment. After all, this is a film that opens with the death of one woman and ends with another revived from her long slumber by true love's kiss.

Ozon's addition of a child to Rendell's story only reinforces the effect: like the most enduring folk stories, this is a tale not just about sex but also about conflicted parenthood. Out shopping, Claire looks like Virginia's daughter, and it's surely no coincidence that when the pair head off on their weekend tryst, Claire tells Gilles that she's visiting her mother. The film's closing images – which suggest that Claire and Virginia have finally pinned down the ethereal Laura through creating her daughter in her likeness, thus preserving the object of their desires in a kind of genetic aspic – have an unsettling undertone, calling to mind the creepy doubles and morbid obsession of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Ⓢ



Precinct patrol: Kevin James

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Six years after the unexpected success of *Paul Blart: Mall Cop*, Kevin James returns for another round of repeated embarrassment, caused both by others' (unprompted) cruelty and his

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Todd Garner
Kevin James
Adam Sandler
Jack Giarraputo
Written by
Kevin James
Nick Bakay
Based on characters
created by Kevin
James, Nick Bakay
**Director of
Photography**
Dean Semler
Film Editor
Scott Hill
**Production
Designer**
Perry Andelin Blake
Music
Rupert Gregson-
Williams
Production Mixer
Steve Cantamessa
Costume Designer
Genevieve Tyrrell

©Columbia Pictures
Industries, Inc.
and LSC Film
Corporation
**Production
Companies**

Columbia Pictures
presents in
association with
LStar Capital a
Happy Madison/
Hey Eddie/Broken
Road production
**Executive
Producers**
Marty P. Ewing
Ben Waisbren
Jeff Sussman

Cast

Kevin James
Paul Blart
Raini Rodriguez
Maya Blart
Neal McDonough
Vincent Sofel
DB Woodside
Robinson
Gary Valentine
Saul Gundermutter
Shirley Knight
mom
Ana Gasteyer
Mrs Gundermutter
Daniella Alonso
Divina Martinez
Shelly Desai
Khan Mubi

David Henrie
Lane
Loni Love
Donna Ericone
Bas Rutten
Henk
Nicholas Turturro
Nick Panero
Eduardo Verastegui
Eduardo Furtillo

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[L85:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures
Releasing UK

own inadequacies, before foiling criminals in a cod-comic *Die Hard* redux. Las Vegas's tourism board has been working hard to entice shoots to town, and in changing the setting from New Jersey's fictional West Orange Pavilion Mall to the sprawling Wynn Las Vegas casino this sequel follows on the heels of the similarly product placement-y *Last Vegas* and *Think Like a Man Too*. *Paul Blart: Mall Cop 2* dutifully showcases the tacky opulence – from indoor gardens populated by ornery peacocks to sub-Cirque du Soleil floor shows – of one of the flagship properties of Steve Wynn, the world's 428th-richest billionaire (who graciously cameos as himself).

In the first film, a barely-above-minimum-wage servant went to body-endangering extremes to protect the interests and property of stores whose products he couldn't afford. The premise is amplified in the sequel, with Blart going all-out to protect Wynn's extensive private art collection (often displayed at his properties). When not on the case, Blart rigorously polices his teen daughter's sexuality, instructing her to carry a monitor so he can listen in on her at all times; he eventually, unconvincingly, learns to let her go. Functionally shot by Andy Fickman, the film is fundamentally sympathetic to Blart's frankly boorish desire to assert himself. It is supposed to be comic, but there's something unavoidably sinister about a repeatedly humiliated man craving situations in which regulatory violence is called for. Given reports of deaths associated with the Taser – including the stun gun's recent role in the allegedly inadvertent police shooting of Eric Harris in Tulsa – a scene in which the main gag is Blart repeatedly Tasing a henchman plays particularly distastefully. Ⓢ

Las Vegas, the present. At a security guard convention, Paul Blart foils a casino art collection heist while learning to accept his daughter's decision to leave him to attend UCLA.

Phoenix

Germany/Poland 2014
Director: Christian Petzold
Certificate 12A 98m 5s

See Feature
on page 38

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

Less a phoenix, more a chimera, Christian Petzold's sixth collaboration with actress Nina Hoss is a

shimmering, quicksilver thing. As the film draws to a hazy close – its images losing focus and becoming indistinct – it's impossible to say quite what has passed before our eyes, but it feels overwhelmingly significant. This is cinema at its most ineffable and its most potent: a structure of gossamer and steel excavated from the debris of Europe's history.

The ghosts of Germany's past have long been a structuring concern for Petzold. After films about the war in Afghanistan (*Jerichow*) and the legacy of the Berlin Wall (*The State I Am In*, *Wolfsburg*, *Ghosts*, *Yella*), *Phoenix* takes us back to a moment in German history just after the end of World War II. The film opens in darkness, with a car, a *noirish* jazz score and a woman without a face. This is Nelly (Hoss), a former singer and concentration-camp survivor whose skull has been shattered by a bullet. We never see the damage wrought by that gunshot, only the shame on the face of the American guard who insists the bandages be removed, and the jaundiced bruises that linger after Nelly's visage has been recreated, not reconstructed, through plastic surgery. In these times there are certain advantages to having a new face, and Nelly – Hoss – is beautiful. But that's beside the point: Nelly no longer recognises herself; indeed, in her own words, she "no longer exists".

The story that follows this unsettling introduction is a slow unravelling, full of hints and feints: an intricate weave of tangled knots and dropped stitches from which, very slowly, the truth of the past begins to emerge. Nelly is looking for her beloved pianist husband Johnny, a gentile, but her friend Lene (Nina Kunzendorf), a clerk in the Hall of Jewish Records, is deliberately keeping them apart, for reasons that emerge only slowly and in fragments. Lene wants to leave Germany and its horrors, to start a new life in Palestine; Nelly is unswerving. When she finally finds Johnny, however, she recognises only a glancing resemblance to the wife he believes to be dead. Wanting to access her fortune (inherited from relatives massacred in the war), he asks Nelly – now going by the name of Esther – to pose as herself.

Petzold, a gifted storyteller who wrote the screenplay in collaboration with the late Harun Farocki, plays cleverly with questions of knowledge, belief and identity, the impenetrability of his characters creating a suspenseful, uncertain atmosphere in which we are never sure what is deceit and what self-deceit. With no prostheses or masks, the inimitable Hoss looks just like Hoss, so why doesn't Johnny recognise her? Why does Nelly herself play along? And why must she undergo a second transformation to 'become' Nelly? According to Johnny, this new woman is "too short" to be herself; she "walks strangely"; her hair is "awful". He picks out dresses and lipstick for her, and forces her to practise her lines and entrances again and again. Little matter if



Face the music: Ronald Zehrfeld, Nina Hoss

Nelly insists that it's hardly authentic to have an Auschwitz survivor return in high heels and chignon: "They want to see Nelly, not a raggedy camp returnee," Johnny tells her.

This damning line gestures to the film's concern not just with Germany's past but also with the failure of art – and cinema in particular – to tell stories about it. *Phoenix* is packed with references to film and its history, from its *noir* aesthetic – elegantly rendered by Petzold's regular collaborators, cinematographer Hans Fromm and production designer K.D. Gruber – to its central premise, which treads a line between the horror and thriller genres and calls to mind such works as *Eyes Without a Face* (1960), *A Woman's Face* (1941) and of course *Vertigo* (1958). Characters make mention of Fritz Lang's *Woman in the Moon* (1929), of UFA stars Zarah Leander and Kristina Söderbaum (both potential models for Nelly's new face), and of Jewish escapee Hedy Lamarr, in whose image Johnny wants to fashion his

wife. The spectres of *Lili Marleen* (1981) and *Cabaret* (1972) hover over the red-lit nightclub – the Phoenix of the film's title – where Johnny works; and with his delicate features, bearish frame and ambiguous morals, Ronald Zehrfeld's Johnny brings to mind Robert Mitchum.

It's telling that Johnny rehearses his dead wife's reunion scene – directing and playing with unnerving accuracy not only his part but also that of all their friends – beside a set of rail tracks, which obviously reference the death trains but are also reminiscent of dolly tracks. The staging of this rehearsal scene thus haunts its later enactment, a tour de force of subtext and layering that is both breathtakingly cinematic and achingly hollow. A work of rare subtlety, *Phoenix* shows us how time and again Adorno has been proven wrong: poetry after Auschwitz is not barbaric; it can be gorgeous, Technicolor, star-studded. Petzold's genius lies in at once aping that glamorous model and offering a haunting, and very welcome, corrective. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Florian Koerner
von Gustorf
Michael Weber

Screenplay

Christian Petzold
In co-operation with
Harun Farocki

Based on the novel *Le Retour des cendres*
by Hubert Monteilhet

Director of Photography

Hans Fromm

Editor

Bettina Bohler

Production Designer

K.D. Gruber

Music

Stefan Will

Original Sound and Vocal Recordings

Andreas Mücke-
Niesytka

Costume Designer

Anette Guthier

©Schramm-Film,
BR, WDR, Arte
Production

Companies

Schramm-Film
Koerner & Weber
in co-operation
with Tempus Film
in co-production
with Bayerischer
Rundfunk,
Westdeutscher
Rundfunk, ARTE
Grant-aided by
Medienboard
Berlin-Brandenburg,
BKM Kulturelle
Filmförderung
des Bundes, FFA
Filmförderung-
sanstalt, DFFF
Deutscher
Filmförderfonds
A film by Christian
Petzold
Executive Producer
Jacek Gaczkowski

Cast

Nina Hoss
Nelly Lenz
Ronald Zehrfeld

Johannes Lenz,
'Johnny'
Nina Kunzendorf
Lene Winter

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Soda Pictures

Germany, mid-1940s. Concentration-camp survivor Nelly undergoes reconstructive surgery on her face, shattered by a gunshot wound. Nelly, a former singer, has inherited a substantial sum from relatives killed in the war, and with her friend Lene is making tentative plans to move to Palestine. However, Nelly is haunted by thoughts of her husband, pianist Johnny, and at night wanders the streets of Berlin looking for him. Nelly finds Johnny working at a club called the Phoenix. He fails to recognise her but, spotting a resemblance to Nelly, asks her to pose as his dead wife to access her money. Nelly, telling him that her name is Esther, agrees, and moves into his flat to practise becoming the woman she once was.

Lene is horrified by the plan, and reveals to Nelly that she suspects Johnny betrayed his wife to the Nazis. When this fails to stall Nelly, Lene kills herself, leaving behind a note informing Nelly that Johnny divorced her before her arrest. Nelly nonetheless goes through with Johnny's plan, enacting a public 'reunion' in front of their old friends, and all seems to go smoothly. As the pair perform a duet for the group, however, Johnny spots Nelly's Auschwitz tattoo. He stops playing long before Nelly finishes the song; she picks up her coat and leaves the room.

Pitch Perfect 2

Director: Elizabeth Banks

Reviewed by Anna Smith

While 2012's *Pitch Perfect* was a relatively safe college comedy, *Pitch Perfect 2* opens with a bolder comic stance. The a cappella group the Barden Bellas have found national fame and are performing in front of an audience including the US president. 'Fat Amy' (Rebel Wilson) hovers precariously from a swing on stage as her colleagues sing below. Entangling herself in the ropes, she rips her leotard and accidentally reveals her genitalia to the crowd.

The camera steers clear of the offending part but it still says as much about the film and its director as it does about the accident-prone Fat Amy. While both *Pitch Perfect* films were written by Kay Cannon, this sequel is the first feature to be directed by comedy actress Elizabeth Banks, who previously helmed a sequence in the notoriously crude *Movie 43* (2013).

With their opening scene, Cannon and Banks not only establish a more mischievous sense of humour but playfully tackle prudish reactions to female nudity, knowingly choosing the song 'Wrecking Ball' by Miley Cyrus, who caused an outcry by performing it nude. The naked reality of womanhood causes the members of the Bellas' audience to reel in horror and cover their eyes – and leads to the group being suspended from college competition. The girls are shamed and ousted from their Garden of Eden and into the big wide world, where tougher challenges but perhaps greater treasures await. They must go international, where everybody 'hates' America, where Germans reign supreme and where, implicitly, nudity is treated with much less consternation.

She may not be the strongest singer but Wilson's Fat Amy remains one of the funniest characters. Sharing the breezy confidence often portrayed by her full-figured *Bridesmaids* co-star Melissa McCarthy, she is easily the most untroubled member of the group, her only apparent problem being an inability to commit to a smitten young man.

While romance and eating disorders figured among the girls' problems in *Pitch Perfect*, this time it's all about community (they must resolve their internal conflicts before they



Eyes on the reprise: *Pitch Perfect 2*

can be an effective group) and career. As the group of undergraduates take their tentative steps outside the college scene, Beca (Anna Kendrick) tackles a secret challenge of her own: an internship at a record company, where a ruthless producer gives her a sharp – and very funny – introduction to the ways of the industry.

Improvisation is used to amusing effect, not least in Beca's scenes with the group's steely German a cappella competitors, whose Teutonic female leader leaves Beca sexually confused. As Chloe, Brittany Snow has a stronger role this time, while wide-eyed recruit Hailee Steinfeld provides a way in for audiences new to the Bellas. Less successful are the casual national stereotypes, such as the Mexican singer who routinely compares the girls' problems to more severe ones faced by immigrants.

All this is forgotten in the musical numbers, rousing harmonious song-and-dance routines performed by the actors and by real-life a cappella groups. It's a terrific watch for a cappella lovers, especially in the 'sing-off' scenes. This is a world where cover versions are hallowed and originality is treated with suspicion. That the girls manage to sneak in a fraction of original material says much about *Pitch Perfect 2*: an enthusiastic remix that couldn't exist without the original but that brings fresh vigour to a concept already set for a third outing. **S**

Rosewater

USA 2014

Director: Jon Stewart

Certificate 15 102m 59s

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Newsweek reporter Maziar Bahari's first appointment in his native Tehran, having travelled from London to cover Iran's 2009 presidential election, is an interview with a young spokesperson at President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's campaign HQ. Watching from the sidelines, Davood – Bahari's driver, and a supporter of reformist candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi – scoffs at the young man's pious intensity: "Who talks like that?" The same could be asked of the liberal Davood and other satellite characters in *Rosewater*, whose expositional first third is awash with this kind of clumpy, overdetermined dialogue.

Similarly wanting for sophistication and groping toward greater refinement is the film's title character Rosewater, a prison guard named for the toilet-water scent that announces him to the blindfolded Bahari (Gael García Bernal), who has been incarcerated on a charge of espionage for disseminating footage of pro-government forces firing at protesters following Ahmadinejad's re-election (judged by Mousavi voters to have been rigged). In Evin prison, Iran's biggest and most notorious jail, Rosewater has been put in charge of Bahari and told that he requires more than the routine 'fist'. This suits Rosewater – not because he has developed an aversion to violence but because he believes himself to be meant for better things than the beatings he administers by rote: pushing a prisoner to confession point by purely psychological torture fits the hubristic image he nurtures of himself, and gives him hope of winning the respect of his superiors. His motivation then is no more complex – and no less human, the film would argue – than workaday professional dissatisfaction.

Rosewater is the writing-directing debut of satirist Jon Stewart, who stepped down from a 16-year stint as host of *The Daily Show* following the film's Telluride premiere. It seems an unusual film on which he should choose to cut his teeth. But Stewart has stated that feelings of "guilt and atonement" were behind his decision to option Bahari's bestselling 2011 memoir *Then They Came for Me*. Stewart's perceived culpability derives from a spoof interview that Bahari conducted in Iran with *The Daily Show*'s Jason Jones, a recording of which was used as evidence of his alleged espionage.

Clearly enamoured of Bahari's ability to spar with his captor, Stewart lets his protagonist's seditious sense of humour dominate the film, punctuating fraught interrogation scenes with flighty irony. The kind of humour that will out no matter what, and is dangerous, is what appeals to Stewart, along with Bahari's intellect. *Rosewater* positions itself as the thinking man's survival film, wherein triumph over adversity rests on the resourcefulness of the trapped male; it is, as such, a cerebral counterpart to Danny Boyle's *127 Hours* (2010).

But there's an irony that Stewart overlooks. Bahari's method of survival is to use Rosewater's sexuality against him, mollifying him Scheherazade-style with tall stories of massages, wanton women and orgies. Lucky for Bahari that he only has to talk about

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Paul Brooks
Max Handelman
Elizabeth Banks

Written by

Kay Cannon

Director of

Photography

Jim Denault

Editor

Craig Alpert

Production Designer

Toby Corbett

Music

Mark Mothersbaugh

Sound Mixer

Lee Orloff

Costume Designer

Salvador Perez

Production

Companies

Universal Pictures

and Gold Circle

Entertainment

presents a Gold Circle

Entertainment/

Brownstone

production

Executive Producers

Scott Niemeyer

Jason Moore

Cast

Anna Kendrick

Beca

Rebel Wilson

Fat Amy

Halle Steinfeld

Emily

Brittany Snow

Chloe

Skylar Astin

Jesse

Adam Devine

Bumper Allen

Katey Segal

Emily's mother

Anna Camp

Aubrey

Alexis Knapp

Stacie

Hana Mae Lee

Lilly

John Michael

Higgins

John

Elizabeth Banks

Gail

Dolby Digital

In Colour

Distributor

Universal Pictures

International

UK & Eire

US, the present. All-female student a cappella group the Barden Bellas are disqualified from their reign after 'Fat Amy' accidentally exposes herself while performing in front of President Obama. The group elect to enter the World Championships in order to regain their status and their right to perform. They are joined by new member Emily. While rehearsing and competing in semi-finals, they struggle to retain their originality and harmony, both on stage and

off. Beca is secretly working at a recording studio and hopes to become a DJ, impressing her boss with her producing skills. Fat Amy starts sleeping with a cappella singer Bumper but backs off when he becomes serious about their relationship. The group attend a retreat and confront their problems. Beca comes clean about the job. The group find their voice. Fat Amy reunites with Bumper. The Barden Bellas triumph at the World Championships.



Prison break: Gael García Bernal

such matters to win the esteem of his captor. Not so a woman, who – in Evin prison, as a matter of course – would be raped, or raped, beaten and killed, as was female journalist Zahra Kazemi in 2003. Irrespective of her intelligence, a woman would not have been able to assuage her jailer with easy-come chauvinist chit-chat in the way that Bahari does.

Of course, survival isn't relative; Bahari does what he must. As he jets out of Tehran, a free man, a would-be sobering, panoptic addendum about other detainees who have not had his "advantage of international attention" isn't enough to offset the general mood of jubilation that colours the last 20 minutes of the film, and which lacks propriety. But it gives pause for thought, which is what Stewart clearly intended. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Scott Rudin
Jon Stewart
Gigi Pritzker
Written for the
Screen by
Jon Stewart
Based on the book
Then They Came for Me by Maziar Bahari
Director of
Photography
Bobby Bukowski
Editor
Jay Rabinowitz
Production
Designer
Gerald Sullivan
Music
Howard Shore
Sound Mixer
Falah Hannoun
Costume Designer
Phaedra William
Dahdaleh

©Odd Lot

Pictures, LLC
Production
Companies
Open Road Films
And Oddlot
Entertainment
present
This production
participated in
The New York
State Governor's
Office for Motion
Picture & Television
Development's
Post Production
Credit Program
Executive
Producers
Lila Yacoub Eli Bush
Chris McShane
Film Extracts
Dr. Strangelove
or: *How I Learned*
to Stop Worrying
and *Love the*
Bomb (1963)

Cast
Gael García Bernal
Maziar Bahari
Kim Bodnia
Rosewater
Claire Foy
Paola
Dimitri Leonidas
Davood
Shohreh
Aghdashloo
Moloojoon
Golshifteh Farahani
Maryam
Haluk Bilginer
Baba Akbar

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
The Works UK
Distribution Ltd

Tehran, 2009. Iranian-Canadian journalist Maziar Bahari travels from London to cover Iran's presidential election for 'Newsweek' magazine. He meets Davood, a supporter of reformist candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi, and takes part in a satirical interview with 'The Daily Show's Jason Jones. Filming on the streets on election day, Bahari is surprised to hear of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's victory before polling has concluded. When the election is declared rigged, Bahari films the ensuing protests, and sends footage of shots fired at demonstrators to the BBC. He is arrested and taken to Evin prison, where he remains in solitary confinement for 118 days. During this time, he is tortured by an interrogator nicknamed Rosewater, pressed to confess to spying on behalf of foreign intelligence agencies and coerced into apologising on television for conspiring with western media to tarnish Iran's electoral process. Following international pressure, Bahari is freed. He flies home to his pregnant wife.

A Royal Night Out

United Kingdom/Belgium/Sweden 2014

Director: Julian Jarrold

Certificate 12A 96m 42s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Prince Charles once told Jeremy Paxman wearily what he thought the function of the British monarchy was: "I think we're a soap opera." Certainly, the 20th-century royals have provided the British film industry with much dramatic fodder, ranging from the lurid *Diana* (2013) to the staunchly sympathetic *The King's Speech* (2010). The toothily critical *The Queen* (2006) even speculated cheerfully about the character and motivation of unknowable monarch and royal icon Queen Elizabeth II. No cats will be set among the royal pigeons, however, by this nostalgic wartime fairytale built around a real event from her youth.

A frothy but eminently respectful comedy drama, its fiction sets young princesses Elizabeth and Margaret tumbling incognito in and out of harmless scrapes among the VE Night crowds in May 1945. With a *Downton Abbey*-style relish for period trappings and protocol, and class-clash comedy involving a partying Princess Margaret, its appeal is firmly to mature audiences. Director Julian Jarrold creates a mix of truth and fantasy, introducing a near-romance for the 19-year-old 'Lizzie' (a sweetly sensible Sarah Gadon) with Jack Reynor's weary working-class airman Jack, a deserter with contempt for the upper classes.

Themes common to all 'monarchy films' are predictably woven through *A Royal Night Out*'s slender plot. The princesses feel trapped and isolated inside the palace, and Lizzie negotiates between tradition and modernity by insisting that she wants to gauge the citizens' opinion of royalty anonymously. Unsurprisingly, the pubs and rammed streets teem with cockney monarchists, making much of how the Windsors shared Blitz dangers with their countrymen in Great Britain's 'finest hour'. Using an effective mix of archive news footage and cannily art-directed bars and narrow streets, the London period settings are well done, down to the playful inclusion of horsemeat being butchered outside a speakeasy. However,

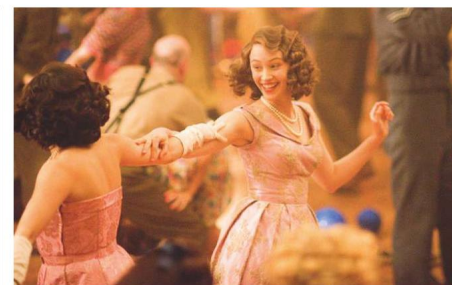
Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Robert Bernstein
Douglas Rae
Screenplay
Trevor de Silva
Kevin Hood
Director of
Photography
Christophe
Beaucarne
Editor
Luke Dunkley
Production Designer
Laurence Dorman
Composer
Paul Englishby
Production

Sound Mixer
Bruce Willis
Costume Designer
Claire Anderson

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Production
Companies
Hanway Films
Presents in
association
with Quickbake
Productions Limited,
Twinstone, Screen
Yorkshire, Scope
Pictures, Lipsync
LLP, Filmgate Films,

Film I Väst, The
Northlight Studios,
Lionsgate an Ecosse
Films production
Produced in
association
with Quickbake
Productions Limited
Made with the
support of the Tax
Shelter System of
the Belgian Federal
Government
GNO Films Limited
has been supported
by the Yorkshire
Content Fund -



The princess diaries: Bel Powley, Sarah Gadon

the pre-war cut-glass accents feel effortful for the younger cast members, who are unable to make "gorm orf" or "awffleh" sound natural.

All this is small beer, though, compared with the film's two overarching problems. Its first flaw is Lizzie, who for reasons of historical accuracy and the avoidance of lèse-majesté can't experience any serious setbacks or any changes to her pleasant, responsible temperament. Second, her relationship with Jack is hobbled by the real facts of Queen Elizabeth's life – Prince Philip of Greece is coyly referred to as "abroad". But more significantly, the film doesn't wish to transgress against our future queen, so the romantic friendship between Jack and Lizzie is a flimsy construct, two amiable but anodyne performances lacking the personality and strong connection that *The King's Speech* managed to create for George VI and Lionel Logue.

It's perhaps a sign of our relaxed times that a confected albeit inoffensive drama like this can be made about a living monarch. Rather than a vulgar impertinence, it seems a comforting fantasy valorising an era when national identity was less complicated and beer was 8d a pint. The Britain we see here is one happy family, a loyal, monarchy-loving monoculture, where the Royal Family play the role of the nation's dutiful parents, and their subjects that of cheeky but ultimately grateful children. **S**

Screen Yorkshire/
European Union
European Regional
Development Fund
Made with the
support of the
UK Film Council's
Development Fund
Executive Producers
Mark Woolley
Peter Watson
Thorsten Schumacher
Hugo Heppell
Peter Hampden
Zygi Kamasa

Cast
Sarah Gadon
Elizabeth Windsor
Bel Powley
Margaret Windsor
Jack Reynor
Jack
Rupert Everett
King George VI
Emily Watson
Queen Elizabeth
Roger Allam
Stan
Mark Hadfield
Mickey
Jack Laskey
Lieutenant Pryce

Jack Gordon
Lieutenant Burridge
Tim Potter
duty manager
Annabel Leventon
Lady MacCloud
Geoffrey Streatfield
Jeffers

In Colour

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

London, 1945. Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret go out incognito on VE Night, despite their parents' concerns. Their chaperones, army officers Pryce and Burridge, leave them alone at a dull party at the Ritz. Unknown to them, Margaret escapes the hotel. Worried Lizzie runs after her. On a bus, Lizzie meets cynical, working-class airman Jack, who reluctantly helps her look for Margaret. They track her to the Curzon Club, where Jack gets into a fight. Caddish officer Jeffers has taken Margaret to a speakeasy-cum-brothel. Woozy from drug-spiked gin, Margaret is rescued by the owner, Stan. Margaret persuades Stan to take her to a Chelsea

Barracks party. Pryce and Burridge confess to the king and queen that the princesses are lost. Lizzie and Jack break into the speakeasy and find out Margaret's whereabouts. On a tugboat to Chelsea, Jack reveals that he has deserted. After a horrific bombing raid, he had been graded LMF (Lack of Moral Fibre) and ordered to fight in the Far East. Lizzie finds Margaret on the dance floor. Jack is arrested by military police, after a punch-up. Lizzie reveals her true identity. Jack takes both girls home to his mother in Battersea. Jack breakfasts at the Palace with the puzzled royals. Lizzie takes him to rejoin his unit. They kiss, and she drives home happily.

Spooks The Greater Good

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Bharat Nalluri
Certificate 15 103m 53s

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

British television has a fine tradition of spy dramas – several traditions, in fact: classy (Smiley); gritty (Callan); fluffy (Steed). But around the time that glasnost arrived in the Soviet Union, those traditions fell into abeyance – whether because of geopolitics or just fashion it's hard to know. *Spooks*, which had a successful run on BBC television from 2002 to 2011 (and in the US under the title *MI-5*), revived all these traditions at once. Classy: the storylines explored, or at any rate exploited, the murky morality and uncertain loyalties inherent in espionage somewhat after the fashion of *le Carré* but within the context of the war on terror, globalisation and cybercrime. Gritty: the notorious early incident in which a female agent was tortured to death in a deep-fat fryer announced a startling (for popular TV) propensity for violence and a willingness to do the unexpected. Fluffy: despite the murk and chip fat, the glamour quotient remained high, with youthful, attractive agents of both sexes.

Spooks: The Greater Good is a belated attempt to revive – or cash in on – the brand nearly four years after the series ended. It has the familiar blend of moral dilemmas, neck-wrenching plot twists and honey-trap casting, along with a budget large enough to allow for credible action sequences and a quick trip abroad. But it is unlikely to appeal to either the faithful or the neophyte.

Hardly any characters familiar from the small screen survive. The principal exception is Peter Firth's no-nonsense counter-terrorism head Sir Harry Pearce, here embodying a Smiley-ish combination of wiliness and moral authority. The newcomers – Kit ("You know nothing, Jon Snow!") Harington as a disgraced ex-agent and Tuppence Middleton as an ingénue spy – are not given the time or dialogue to achieve believability or emotional impact. Almost every element of plot and action – the Muslim terrorist antagonist, the 'traitor within', Firth and Harington's quasi-oedipal conflict, a rendezvous at Berlin's Alexanderplatz, an against-the-clock download from a hacked computer, the maguffin of a



Riddler on the roof: Kit Harington

threat to British intelligence from the US (cf. *le Carré*'s 'cousins') – has an off-the-shelf feel. What ought to be reversals of expectation are too forced to engender surprise or even interest: a fake suicide that fools nobody; a confession of treachery from a hitherto insignificant character; a 'fatal' shooting that turns out to be fine because the target had a bulletproof vest.

Finally, the all-action denouement relies on the assumption that, even following major security breaches and the clearly faked suicide of a senior agent, MI5 would not change any of its security arrangements. However unsurprising that might be in the real world of bureaucratic snafus, in the fictional world of the hyper-competent spy, it will not stand. **S**

Spring

USA/Italy 2014
Directors: Justin Benson, Aaron Moorhead

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

Writer-director Justin Benson and his co-director Aaron Moorhead have established themselves as specialists in the crossbreeding of genres. Their low-budget debut *Resolution* (2012) took a familiar cabin-in-the-woods scenario for a Pirandello-esque spin, sending its principal characters on a quest to meet their maker; and 'Bonestorm', their contribution to the 2014 anthology *VHS Viral*, equipped skater-boys with GoPro cameras to depict encounters with Mexican satanists, the undead and demons as just another escapade in the slackers' average day. Death – and the unusual blurring of different film forms – also dominates their latest, *Spring*, though love too is now incorporated into the genetic makeup.

Spring begins with Evan (Lou Taylor Pucci) at his dying mother's bedside as she tells him that she loves him before quietly passing away, casting the twentysomething ex-student adrift as the last of his line. Jobless, in trouble after a violent incident in a bar and with nothing more to lose, Evan uses his small inheritance to flee to Italy. Still grieving, he ends up in a pretty coastal town where he begins to put down new roots, getting a job as a farmhand to local widower Angelo (Francesco Carmelutti) and embarking on a whirlwind affair with well-travelled evolutionary geneticist Louise (Nadia Hilker).

"Nature is crazy," says Evan, amazed to see oranges and lemons growing on a single tree. "Old tree uses new tree," explains Angelo, adding that a "volcano makes good soil" – even a volcano that, two millennia earlier, wiped out an entire city's populace (including Louise's ancestors). Yet what dies in winter often comes back to life in spring, and even as Evan blooms again in Louise's presence and contemplates a future with her, this engaging young couple's fling begins to resonate, over the course of a single week, with the cycles, recurrences and mutations that define all life – and death. If Louise will turn out to be an all-new (yet ancient) form of movie monster, the film itself is also a strange hybrid whose essential romance



Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Ollie Madden
Jane Featherstone
Stephen Garrett
Screenplay
Sam Vincent
Jonathan Brackley
Based on the television series
Spooks created by David Wolstencroft
Director of

Photography
Hubert Taczanowski
Editor
Jamie Pearson
Production Designer
Simon Bowles
Music
Dominic Lewis
Sound Mixer
Ian Voigt
Costume Designer
Colleen Kelsall

©Spooks Greater Good Limited
Production Companies
Pinewood Pictures and Isle of Man Films present in association with BBC, Creative England and Altitude Film Entertainment
a Kudos/Shine Pictures production

Supported by Creative England
Executive Producers
Steve Christian
Ivan Dunleavy
Richard Holmes

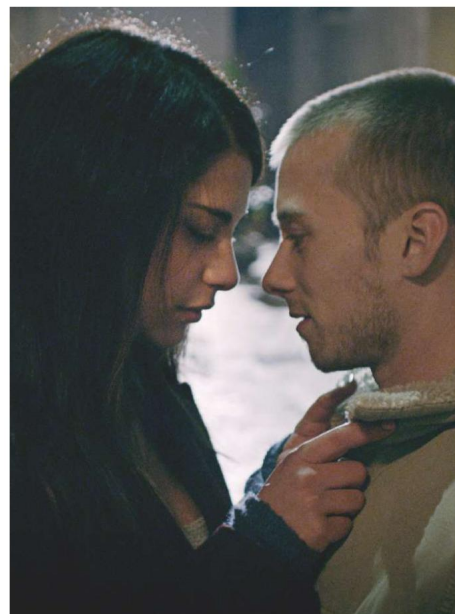
Cast
Peter Firth
Harry Pearce
Kit Harington

Will Holloway
Jennifer Ehle
Geraldine Maltby
Elyes Gabel
Adam Qasim
Tuppence Middleton
June Keaton
Eleanor Matsuura
Hannah Santo
Lara Pulver
Erin Watts
Tim McInnerny

Oliver Mace
David Harewood
Francis Warrender
Hugh Simon
Malcolm Wynn-Jones
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

London, the present. After an MI5 convoy escorting terrorist Qasim is ambushed, counter-terrorism chief Harry Pearce fakes suicide so that he can find and secretly negotiate with Qasim. MI5, seeing through the ruse, traces a call from Harry to disgraced agent Will Holloway, who agrees to help track Harry down. Harry contacts Will and tells him there is a traitor within MI5. Will and agent June Keaton investigate a suspect: in a scuffle, June shoots the man. A bomb attack at a theatre kills MI5 chief Warrender; Geraldine Maltby becomes acting chief. Will helps Harry hack into MI5's computers to download secret files. In Berlin, Harry tries to trade the files to the Russians for Qasim's wife, whom they are holding prisoner. June fails to

assassinate Harry and Will – she has been working for the traitor. It transpires that Qasim's wife is dead. Back in London, agent Hannah Santo poses as Qasim's wife to help Harry bargain for information. The ruse fails but Qasim still tells Harry the location of his bomb factory. Harry and Will are caught and taken to MI5 HQ. Qasim and his men burst in – Harry obtained the information about the bomb factory's location by revealing MI5 access codes. Amid shooting, agent Emerson announces he is the traitor; Will shoots Qasim. At a country retreat, Harry confronts Geraldine Maltby: she was the real traitor – she had planned to discredit MI5 so that she could head an American-run takeover. Harry has already slipped a fatal dose of poison into her lunch.



Voyage to Italy: Nadia Hilker, Lou Taylor Pucci

is enhanced rather than disrupted by the admixture of horror elements. And while the film's scope extends to the outer limits of science, history and theology, everything is grounded in the leads' charming, funny characters and believable performances.

"What do you like more, pool or ocean?" Although this question might seem natural enough when posed alongside the porous Italian coastline, Louise's words allude to the place of the finite within the infinite, as her own mutant immortality plays ocean to Evan's more circumscribed (gene) pool. Much as its tourist-town setting looks out over the boundless sea beyond, *Spring* exposes its week-long affair to eternity, extending way beyond the normal limits of the horror genre to engender a creature feature at the shoreline of biology and romance. Splicing the DNA of Richard Linklater's *Before Sunrise* (1995) and Andrzej Zulawski's *Possession* (1981), this true original manages to be both melancholic and hopeful, contemporary and timeless. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer David Lawson Justin Benson Aaron Moorhead	Veronica Lopez American Crew: Laura Cristina Ortiz	Nick Nevern Thomas
Written by Justin Benson	©Spring LLC	In Colour [2.35:1]
Cinematographer Aaron Moorhead	Production Companies XYZ Films with the support of Apulia Film Commission A Moorhead & Benson film	Distributor Metrodome Distribution Ltd
Edited by Michael Felker Justin Benson Aaron Moorhead Giulio Tiberti	Executive Producers Nate Bolotin Todd Brown Aram Tertzakian Nick Spicer	
Designers Italian Crew: Fabrizio D'Arpino American Crew: Melissa Lyon	Cast Lou Taylor Pucci Evan Nadia Hilker Louise Francesco Carnelutti Angelo	
Music Jimmy Lavalie		
Sound Mixers Italian Crew: Fabio Conca American Crew: George Wymenga		
Costume Designers Italian Crew:		

California, present day. After his mother – his last remaining relative – dies, Evan gets into a vicious bar fight which sees him fired from his job as the bar's sous-chef and pursued by a gang and the police. With nothing left to lose, Evan heads to Italy. Arriving in a coastal town, he takes a job as a farmhand for the widowed Angelo, and spends his nights with Louise, a sexually forward student of evolutionary genetics. In fact, Louise is a mutated human who has fallen pregnant every 22 years for nearly two millennia, giving birth to a rejuvenated version of herself after a brief period of gestation during which she undergoes unstable and aggressive transformations. Inseminated by Evan and concerned that she might hurt him, Louise breaks off their relationship. Distraught, he returns to her house and sees her in her monstrous form. Undaunted, he decides to stay with her until her final transformation, despite the danger to himself. With the immigration police on his tail, Evan travels with Louise to Naples, and then to Pompeii. Louise reveals that her own mother was made mortal by the chemicals that her body produced when she fell in love; after giving birth to Louise and passing on her condition, she and her husband were killed in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. Evan sees in the dawn with Louise, hoping that she too will fall in love.

Still

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Simon Blake
Certificate 15 98m 49s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Simon Blake's debut feature is a study of disintegration – of a man and of his environment. Tom Carver (Aidan Gillen) is a photographer, and on the evidence we're shown a pretty good one. But his life is unravelling following the death of his teenage son, supposedly killed in a hit-and-run accident. His marriage has collapsed, though his ex-wife Rachel (Amanda Mealing) still visits him, worried about his drinking, drug-taking and general moral and physical decline – in all of which, she suspects, his seedy best friend Ed (Jonathan Slinger) abets him.

Blake makes subtle but effective use of lighting and decor to convey Tom's deterioration. At first his apartment, though scruffy, looks comfortable and homely; but as the film progresses and Tom becomes increasingly embroiled with a local teenage street gang, the colour leaches out of the rooms, the shadows deepen and the furniture gives way to heaps of trash. And by the time his glamorous and much younger girlfriend (Elodie Yung) leaves him, Tom appears to be living in little better than a derelict squat. In parallel, the streets outside (shrewdly chosen locations around King's Cross and the Caledonian Road in North London), locus of everything that threatens him, seem to grow steadily darker and more sinister.

As the external pressure mounts on Tom – an aggressive confrontation at a flower nursery, a mutilated cat dumped on his doorstep, the rape of his girlfriend – his inner demons emerge, twisting his perceptions until it seems as if the gang (or gangs – we never learn if it's always the same bunch of youths responsible) are the emanation of his own guilt-ridden, self-torturing psyche. In one of the film's more wrenching moments he screams at Rachel, intent on hurting her as much as he's hurting: "Just stop trying to tell me what to do! You're not a fucking mother any more!"

Gillen's skill at switching in an eye-blink from louchely charming to lethally psychotic (well exploited in his role as the devious Petyr 'Littlefinger' Baelish in *Game of Thrones*) is pushed to extremes here. Tom's exchanges with Rachel (Mealing's performance is no less grief-stricken but far more grounded) lie



Unravelling man: Aidan Gillen, Elodie Yung

at the heart of the film, and as her influence over him wanes and Ed's increases, he's edged steadily closer to thoughts of retribution. *Still* is an intensely controlled film, its mood enhanced by long deliberate takes as it slides slowly and inexorably towards the final abyss.

The film only loses traction a little in the climax, where elements and revelations are added simply to build tension. That apart, though, this is an impressively accomplished first feature, notable for the fine performances Blake draws from his cast – not least from 19-year-old rapper Sonny Green as Tom's chief tormentor Carl. Blake has now set up his own production company, with three projects currently in preparation; on the strength of the present film, something to look forward to. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Colette Delaney-Smith Zorana Piggott	Agnieszka Liggett Production Designer Mayou Trikerioti	©Blunt Pictures Production Companies Blunt Pictures and O11 Productions present in association with LipSync Productions LLP	Delaney-Smith Peter Hampden Norman Merry	Elodie Yung Christina Amanda Mealing Rachel Sonny Green Carl Kate Ashfield Margaret	Distributor Verve Pictures/ Blunt Pictures
Written by Simon Blake	Composer Alex Gray	Executive Producers Graeme		In Colour	
Director of Photography Andy Parsons	Sound Mixer Billy Quinn				
Editor	Costume Designer Camille Benda				

North London, the present. Photographer Tom Carver and his ex-wife Rachel visit the grave of their teenage son Steven, killed a year ago in what seemed to be a hit-and-run accident. Rachel worries that Tom is drinking too much and letting himself go. He lives with his glamorous younger girlfriend Christina, but spends much of his time with his friend Ed, a reporter. On an assignment at a local school, Tom notices a disturbed ten-year-old, Jimmy. He learns that Jimmy's older brother was killed in a gang fight. Tom is contacted by a gallery that wants to exhibit his photographs. While buying flowers for Steven's grave, Tom clashes with a gang of youths led by 15-year-old Carl. At his photography exhibition, Tom gets drunk. At

home he slumps in a stupor until Christina arrives, having been raped by a gang of youths wearing masks. She moves out. Jimmy is badly beaten up and hospitalised by Carl's gang. Convinced that the same gang raped Christina, Tom and Ed hunt down Carl, bundle him into a van, take him to Tom's flat and tie him up. Ed leaves Tom with Carl. Tom beats Carl, then prepares an overdose of heroin. Carl begs for mercy, telling him that Steven was a member of their gang, and died by accident when they were playing chicken. Tom injects Carl with the drug. Panicking, Ed races frantically back to the flat. He finds Tom cradling Carl's dead body.

The Supreme Price

USA/Italy 2013

Director: Joanna Lipper

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

In the West, ever-lengthening election seasons and ballooning campaign budgets often feel more like a form of punishment than an opportunity to exercise a hard-won right. In Nigeria's most recent election, however, the frustration came from concerns about the proper distribution of ballots (which postponed the election twice) and from the two frontrunners: incumbent Goodluck Jonathan, whose unpopular and controversial decisions included removing the national fuel subsidy, and Muhammadu Buhari, a former general who ruled the country under a military dictatorship between 1983 and 1985.

For Hafsát Abiola, Nigeria's struggles to strengthen its emerging democracy are deeply personal: her father, billionaire Moshood Kashimawo Olawale (MKO) Abiola, parlayed his business acumen, philanthropy and large family into getting elected by a landslide in 1993 after General Babangida promised to dissolve his military dictatorship. When Babangida annulled the election and jailed MKO for treason, Hafsát's mother Kudirat, MKO's second wife (MKO was a polygamist with many mistresses), took up the fight to restore democracy. The international pressure she exerted on the military government ultimately got her assassinated, just a day before she was set to fly to Hafsát's graduation at Harvard. Rather than let herself be defeated, Hafsát sprang into action and embarked on her own press tour of the States.

She now divides her time between Lagos, where she runs the Kudirat Initiative for Democracy (a non-profit organisation that helps women become leaders) and holds a state cabinet position, and Belgium, where her diplomat husband and two young children live. Her particular brand of feminism doesn't immediately mesh with Nigeria's conservative society (during an interview, one of her brothers quotes a passage from the Koran which says that any state governed by a woman will fall), but her compassion and way with words have made a



Beacon of hope: Hafsát Abiola

tangible difference for many in Ogun State.

Despite this undeniably uplifting message, *The Supreme Price* is far from a paragon of documentary filmmaking. Made for an audience unfamiliar with Nigeria's ethnic, religious and geographic divisions, the film has its interviewees set out key events in the country's post-colonial history. Unsurprisingly, this leads to a few instances of wince-inducing shorthand – the Biafran War, for example, is glossed over in about 30 seconds. Nigeria's second republic, which held two democratic elections between 1979 and 1983 before a military coup reinstated a dictatorship, doesn't get mentioned at all; one can only wonder whether such an elision is to play up the importance of the 1993 transition to democracy, or because of president-elect Buhari's co-leadership role in that coup. (Buhari officially denies this, despite many former generals' statements to the contrary.)

Reducing some 50 years of history into preamble points to the larger problems of documentaries that attempt to compress personal and historical narratives, and show how filtering one through the other usually does a disservice to both. Nobel Prize-winning writer Wole Soyinka appears as a talking head, and his lifelong (and life-threatening) criticism of the Nigerian government is abbreviated to include only his actions following the annulment of MKO Abiola's presidential win and some fairly mild political commentary.

Just as problematic is the portrayal of Hafsát herself, who, while serving double duty as historian and faultless subject, is sometimes difficult to grasp on a personal level. Although it's very clear how her mother's life and assassination have shaped her feminist values, activism and career choices, the influence of her education at Phillips Academy Andover, one of the richest private boarding schools in the US, goes unexplored.

Sadly, avoiding such topics gives the documentary the air of a stiff, state-sanctioned portrait rather than a film made by someone who's known Hafsát for some 20 years. (Director Joanna Lipper was at Harvard at the same time, and the two women have kept in contact since.) The few attempts to illustrate more emotional moments – Hafsát's return to Nigeria, crying as she retells the story of her mother's assassination, for example – are diluted by clunky formal devices (slow motion, fade to black, etc). Given Hafsát's seemingly boundless talent, it wouldn't be surprising if she picked up a camera soon and made a better documentary herself. 

Timbuktu

Director: Abderrahmane Sissako

Certificate 12A 95m 56s



Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Abderrahmane Sissako's film *Timbuktu* takes place during the occupation of that city by Islamists. The occupiers want to enforce sharia law, but to their frustration they discover that the city is populated for the most part by quietly observant Muslims, which makes their jihad quite unnecessary – a local imam (Adel Mahmoud Cherif) says as much. But, like any organisational bureaucracy, the zealous occupiers must find a reason to justify their existence, and so they start to impose arbitrary dictates on their subjects, common sense be damned.

The occupiers are a polyglot group: many of them can't communicate with each other without a translator, and they are no more successful in communicating with the people they now rule. They are lonely, far from home, and some of them are horny – like Abdelkrim (Abel Jafri), whose visits to Satima (Toulou Kiki), a Taureg woman living outside the town, are a cause of concern to her and her herdsman husband Kidane (Ibrahim Ahmed). They are awkward, these new rulers of Timbuktu, unaccustomed to exercising power and not confident enough to push their luck. One soldier fumbles through a recruitment video, blowing his lines. A motorcycle putters through town, its rider laying down the new law via megaphone: "No smoking! No listening to music! No soccer!" Eventually the bans will be shortened to include, simply, "Any old thing."

We see Abdelkrim sneaking a smoke and trying to learn how to drive a stick shift, and he seems more a shy bumbler than a warrior of God; the occupying army appear to be a bunch of busybodies who surely must see there's nothing to do here and move on. It is even rather funny, at first, to see the invaders quibbling with an incredulous populace trying to go about their affairs, telling worshippers at the mosque to shorten their trousers, or forcing a fishmonger to wear reeking gloves in the midday heat. What is not immediately obvious is that this is the behaviour of the bully who has already decided to hit you and wants to see how far he can push you before you finally give him a pretext to do what he has wanted all along. The invaders are seen early on taking target shots at gazelles and pieces of looted statuary depicting unclothed females. They aren't likely to let that practice go to waste. But still we can't quite believe it: these men are thoroughgoing mediocrities, and something in us rebels at the idea of mediocrities being capable of anything spectacular – and acts of violence are, of course, spectacular.

And then the boom is lowered. An impromptu musical evening, shot in a sweetly drifting style, is suddenly broken up by soldiers – such casual mixing of the sexes is banned – and the female singer receives 40 lashes in a public square the next day. A local girl is forced into marriage with one of the soldiers, who first comes calling under the guise of courtship but who rather quickly lets it be known that his request will not be denied. A couple, buried to their necks in sand, are stoned to death – we see only a little, but it is enough. Kidane too will stand accused – for a real crime, as it happens. That Sissako 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Joanna Lipper

Cinematography

Richard Sands

Joanna Lipper

Lisa Rinzier

Film Editor

Geoff Richman

Editors

Tina Grapenthin

Ali Muney

Music

Composed by

Nathan Larson

Location Sound

Recordists

Richard Sands

Olabode Odeyemi

Brady Holden

Ariel Roubinov

@Vertumnus

Productions Inc.

Production Companies

Vertumnus

Productions

presents

A film by Joanna

Lipper

Major funding

for The Supreme

Price provided

by Just Films

Ford Foundation,

ITVS, MacArthur

Foundation

Additional support

provided by Gucci,

Tribeca Film

Institute, Chicken

& Egg Pictures,

GTDF Gucci Tribeca

Documentary Fund,

WMM Women Make

Movies, Good Pitch,

IFP Independent

Film Week

In Colour

Part-subtitled

[1.78:1]

Distributor

Vertumnus

Productions

A documentary following the career of human-rights activist Hafsát Abiola. The daughter of MKO Abiola, who was imprisoned by the military after winning Nigeria's 1993 presidential election, and Kudirat Abiola, who was assassinated in 1996 after opposing the military dictatorship, Hafsát has taken up her parents' struggle to strengthen democracy in Nigeria.



Cry havoc: Fatoumata Diawara

can show that the fate of a murderer is no less unjust than that of an innocent in this anarchic environment is a testament to his moral intelligence, and his faith in his audience.

They rape and pillage, these invaders, though they don't do so in a forthright way, as proper barbarians, but rather cloaked in the guise of righteousness. Watching the gradual shift from merely symbolic displays of power to bloodshed, the effect is something like being caught in a nightmare that you recognise as such but can't wake from or control. Essential to Sissako's accomplishment is his underlining of the extraordinary *strangeness* of these goings-on, making one think, "Surely this can't be happening?" even though we know full well that such things happen all the time.

As has been widely noted in reviews of *Timbuktu*, these things do indeed happen; many have happened in the months since Sissako's

film played in competition at the 2014 Cannes festival, and will certainly continue to. But to make Sissako's film the sum total of its 'relevance' is to reduce it – as a political act, it is at best a lovely but symbolic statement of resistance, like the fabulously bedecked local witch, Zabou, blockading the street from the occupying army, or the resourceful boys circumnavigating the football ban by pantomiming a match in a dusty lot without a ball. The fact remains that there are few filmmakers alive today wearing a mantle of moral authority comparable to that which Sissako has taken upon himself, and if his film has been met with an extraordinary amount of acclaim, it is because he manages to wear this mantle lightly, and has not confused drubbing an audience with messages with profundity. I can't imagine the film having been made any other way, by anyone else – and this is one measure of greatness. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Sylvie Pialat
Screenplay
Abderrahmane
Sissako
Kessen Tall
Cinematographer
Sofiane El Fani
Editor
Nadia Ben Rachid
Art Director
Sébastien Birchler
Music

Amine Bouhafa
Sound
Philippe Welsh
Roman Dymny
Thierry Delor
Costumes
Ami Sow
**Production
Companies**
A Les Films du Worso,
Dune Vision, Arches
Films, ARTE France

Cinéma, Orange
Studio co-production
With the participation
of Canal+, Ciné+,
ARTE France, Le
Pacte, TV5 Monde,
Centre National
du Cinéma et de
l'Image Animée
In association
with Indéfيلمs 2
With the support of
Doha Film Institute

Cast
Ibrahim Ahmed
Kidane
Toulou Kiki
Satima
Abel Jafri
Abdelkrim
Fatoumata Diawara
Fatou
Hichem Yacoubi
jihadist
Ketty Noël
Zabou

Mehdi AG Mohamed
Issan
Layla Walet
Mohamed
Toya
Adel Mahmoud
Cherif
imam
Salem Dendou
chief jihadist
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Subtitles
Distributor
Curzon Film World

Timbuktu, Mali, 2012. Jihadists have taken over the city, an ancient capital and centre of learning, and have begun to impose Sharia law. As the inhabitants are, for the most part, a pious people, this imposition is redundant, though the occupiers busy themselves snuffing out sport, song and any activity involving fun or leisure. The local imam chides them for blundering into his mosque and interrupting services. Kidane, a Taureg herdsman, lives in a tent outside the town with his wife, Satima, their daughter and an orphaned boy.

Kidane is alarmed when one of the occupying fighters, Abdelkrim, begins skulking around his residence and his wife. Back in town, the emboldened occupiers have begun to punish transgressions with lashings and stonings. Zabou, a local madwoman who may be a witch, puts up a one-woman resistance. When one of Kidane's cows is killed after wandering into the net of a fisherman, he goes to settle the score. In a struggle, he kills the fisherman. Unable to pay the necessary compensation to the family of the deceased, he is sentenced to death.

Tokyo Tribe

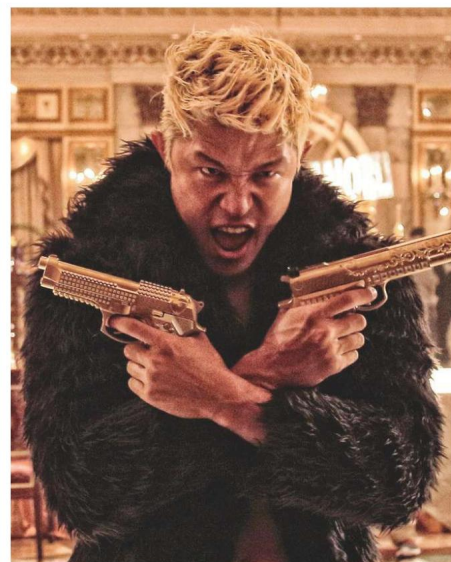
Director: Sono Sion
Certificate 18 116m 23s

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Some things never change. It's sweetly reassuring that, at the age of 53, Sono Sion is still intent on getting down with the kids by making a 'battle-rap musical'. (Incidentally, the correct reading of the *kanji* used to write his personal name is 'Shion', but he prefers 'Sion'.) *Tokyo Tribe*, inevitably, is adapted from a popular manga. The notion of warring fashion-tribes has been a manga staple for at least three decades, probably inspired by the Sunday face-offs in Yoyogi Park, and the field was already crowded when Inoue Santa launched his *Tokyo Tribe* series in 1993. Like many of its rivals, Inoue's story of assorted 'good' tribes uniting against dark-cult baddies features endless macho posturing, spasms of great brutality, fetishised 'tough girls' and generous helpings of sexualised violence against women. Sono's film version, of course, follows suit.

The Peter Pan of Japan's fake-punk scene was himself once a rebel of sorts: Sono chafed against the frustrations of being an adolescent loner in Stickville (actually Toyokawa, Aichi Prefecture) by writing assertive poetry and making bratty super 8 films. When he began to attract attention as an idiosyncratic indie voice he won a grant from PIA Film Festival – the primary supporter of independent filmmaking in Japan – to make his first 16mm feature in 1990. A decade of oddball indie features followed, including a film in which his then girlfriend repeatedly counted from one to 100 and a singularly joyless foray into gay male porn, before he reinvented himself as a provocateur in the mainstream of Japanese cinema. Following (quite a long way behind) Miike Takashi, he has spent the last 15 years seeking out inflammatory material, some of it sparked by news reports (*Suicide Club*, 2001, *Cold Fish*, 2010, and a couple of films prompted by the 2011 tsunami), the rest drawn from generic horror-fantasy traditions.

The Big Idea in *Tokyo Tribe* is to have most of the damn thing performed in rap, a decision which adds the entire faded repertoire of gangsta bling and bravado to Sono's already tired and derivative battery of visual tricks – and which limits the movie to the same monotonous



Gun crazy: Suzuki Ryohei

Top Five

USA 2014
Director: Chris Rock
Certificate 15 101m 52s

beat pretty much throughout. The visual tricks include splashy captions in Day-Glo colours, odd moments of split-screen, and a preponderance of scrappily fast-cut handheld shots interspersed with occasional meandering long-take crane shots. The hip-hop aspect is steered by rap star Young Dais, who makes a personable enough movie debut as the hero Kai but cannot solve the problem that, as ever, Japanese fashions in pop music are hopelessly second-hand and a good ten years out of date.

Sono's touchstone was clearly *A Clockwork Orange* (right down to Beethoven references) rather than Japanese precedents like Ishii Sogo's *Burst City* (1982) or Shinohara Tetsuo's *The Complete Japanese Showa Songbook* (2004). His Malcolm McDowell is Suzuki Ryohei as the frequently near-naked villain Mera (Suzuki became a star playing the queer superhero in 2013's *Hentai Kamen*); the plot turns on Mera's discovery that Kai has a bigger penis than his own. The heartwarming payoff line is "It's the size of a man's heart that makes him great, not his penis." Rebel Sono's homely lesson to us all. 

Credits and Synopsis

Producers Chiba Yoshinori Iizuka Nobuhiro	Production in collaboration with Nikkatsu Chofu Studio	Takeuchi Riki Buppa
Production Oguchi Ayako Yuri Keizo	Executive Producers Oguchi Kinya Tanaka Tadashi	In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles
Written by Sono Sion Based on <i>Tokyo Tribe</i> 2 by Inoue Santa	Cast Suzuki Ryohei Mera Young Dais Kai Seino Nana Sunmi, Erika Daitoh Shunsuke Iwao Ishida Takuya Kim Ichikawa Yui Norichan Bernard Ackah Zandakinsu Joey Kamekichi Kubozuka Yosuke Nkoi	Distributor Eureka Entertainment
Cinematographer Soma Daisuke		Japanese theatrical title Tokyo Toraiibu
Editor Ito Junichi		
Production Designer Hayashida Yuji		
Music BCDMG		
Sound Recording Watanabe Shinji		
Costume Designer Matsumoto Chieko		
Action Director Takuma Toshiro		
Production Companies Django Film		

Tokyo, the future. Each district in the north and west of the city is dominated by a local gang, hostile to both the police and interlopers from other gangs. Lord Buppa and his depraved son Nkoi rule Bukuro (aka Ikebukuro) in cahoots with Mera, macho kingpin of the Wu-Ronz gang, who nurses a deep hatred of Kai, a member of the peace-and-love tribe Musashino-Saru. As Buppa's goons pressgang a runaway girl (she calls herself Sunmi) from the night streets of Bukuro, Mera launches a plan to lure Kai to Bukuro by trapping his friend Kim. Sunmi is actually Erika, daughter of the High Priest worshipped by Buppa and his minions; she is on the run from her father's sacrificial tendencies. Kai duly leads a small rescue party into Bukuro to save Kim... just as a hitherto unknown gang of paramilitaries calling themselves Waru make their move to conquer the entire city. Kai persuades all the other gangs to unite against Waru and the Bukuro villains. In the ensuing battle, in which Buppa and Nkoi die and Waru is beaten, it emerges that Mera has hated Kai since he discovered in a sauna that Kai's penis was bigger than his own. Mera is beaten by Kai; Erika and Kai kiss, and the previously rival gangs unite under the banner of 'Tokyo Tribe'.



Talk the talk: Chris Rock, Rosario Dawson

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"Everything means something," declares Andre Allen (Chris Rock) to his companion Chelsea Brown (Rosario Dawson), in the opening scene of *Top Five*, as the camera tracks their walk-and-talk through the New York streets.

Chelsea disagrees, insisting, "Sometimes a movie is just a movie, sometimes a song is just a song, sometimes a joke is just a joke – remember those, jokes?" A photographer, poet, musician, loving single mother, recovering alcoholic and journalist writing under various pseudonyms for very different publications, Chelsea is able not only to keep up with but also to run circles around the more famous André as she spends the day interviewing him for a *New York Times* profile. This coincides with the release of André's latest feature *Uprize*, a violent biopic of Haitian revolutionary Dutty Boukman, and Chelsea is catching him at a moment of crisis. A recovering alcoholic himself, and convinced that the laughs he used to inspire – first as a successful stand-up comedian and then as the star of lowbrow Hollywood buddy comedies – derived solely from his drinking, he is struggling to make the transition to more "thought-provoking entertainment", even as his public want him to keep on playing the clown. He is also on the verge of getting married to Erica Long (Gabrielle Union) but wondering how real their relationship is, given that it's all being stage-managed for a reality-TV show.

The marriage that André seeks between popularity and authenticity finds its embryonic form in that opening sequence: for as this pair of intimate strangers wander through the city, their conversation similarly meanders free-associatively from meaningless entertainment to the breaking down of racial, social and sexual divides in America. At the same time, *Top Five* itself is taking shape before our eyes, smartly

stretching the boundaries of its romcom frame to accommodate all manner of material, while never forgetting to be funny as well as serious. The contrast with *Uprize*, full of bludgeoning ire against white hegemony but free of both laughs and an audience, could not be clearer – and yet even as André's Haitian *Django* tanks at the box office, *Top Five* represents its own brand of revolution against a Hollywood cultural model that tends to reduce African-American or Hispanic characters to comic foils and sidekicks – or to the cinematic periphery. Just as comfortable discussing the politics of race or the dynamics of family as articulating their chequered erotic histories, here André and Chelsea take centre stage as educated, confident, fully rounded characters – and here it's Jerry Seinfeld and Adam Sandler who, in cameos as themselves, occupy the sidelines normally reserved for people of colour (though Whoopi Goldberg is there with them).

Top Five derives its name from a bonding game that André plays with his extended New York family, who take it in turns to list their top five rap artists. Though rooted in a fixed musical genre, this game enables its participants to make complex statements about their own shifting identities and allegiances without confining them to overly rigid rules (several throw in a sixth choice for good measure). The titular game reflects, in its eclecticism and the flexibility of its rules, the film's playful approach to its own chosen romcom form. For if André and Chelsea must juggle the conflicting aspects of their multifaceted, ever-evolving lives and resurfacing pasts, *Take Five* itself comes with its own polymorphous identity and influences. On the one hand, writer-director Rock is giving popular romance a smart, contemporary spin – much as, for a school project, Chelsea's young daughter updates the Cinderella fairytale (a key intertext here) to fit her own experience of modern New



York. On the other hand, the format in which we see two adults sharing one another's company over a single day and night, recalls the introspective, explorative walk-and-talk of Richard Linklater's *Before...* films. Perhaps, though, the most striking intertext is Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman*, whose production coincided with *Top Five*'s. For just as Michael Keaton's Riggan Thomson is shadowed by a past populist role even as he seeks a less crassly commercial persona for himself, so André exits every public appearance pursued by a bear – more specifically, by 'Hammy', the ridiculous ursine 'character' he played in literally dehumanising costume for a blockbuster franchise and that he would now like to leave behind forever. Both films profile the anxiety-riddled metamorphoses of individuals within an industry of illusion.

The political and cultural ground covered along the way lends a solid, substantial foundation to a witty film on a quest for both its own form of sincerity and for a public appreciative of self-conscious sophistication. In this flimsiest of genres, that really means something. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Scott Rudin
Eli Bush
Written by
Chris Rock
Director of Photography
Manuel Alberto Claro
Film Editor
Anne McCabe
Production Designer
Richard Hoover
Original Score
Ahmir 'Questlove' Thompson
Sound Mixer
Justin Gray
Costume Designer
Amy Roth

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Pictures and IAC
Films present

With the support
of the New York
State Governor's
Office for Motion
Picture & Television
Development
Executive Producers
Tony Hernandez
Lila Yacoub

Cast
Chris Rock
Andre Allen
Rosario Dawson
Chelsea Brown
Gabrielle Union
Erica Long
J.B. Smoove
Silk
Romany Malco
Benny Barnes
Cedric the Entertainer
Jazzy Dee
Ben Vereen
Carl
Bruce Bruce

himself
Anders Holm
Brad
Sherri Shepherd
Vanessa
Jay Pharoah
Mike
DMX
himself
Tracy Morgan
Fred

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Paramount
Pictures UK

New York City, the present. Visiting from LA to promote his serious new film 'Uprize', comedian Andre Allen agrees to be interviewed by journalist Chelsea Brown for a 'New York Times' profile, despite having been mistreated in the past by the publication's film critic James Nielson. Over the course of the day, Andre meets Chelsea's mother, her cheating boyfriend and her Cinderella-obsessed daughter; she, meanwhile, meets his extended local family, who bond by listing their top five rappers. Andre gradually opens up to Chelsea about his alcoholism, his desire to be taken seriously, his fear of no longer being funny and his mixed feelings about his impending marriage to reality-TV star Erica Long. After Andre and Chelsea share a passionate clinch in a café bathroom, Andre discovers that Nielson is in fact one of Chelsea's pseudonyms. Feeling betrayed, he storms off, and following a drunken incident in a shop, is jailed. Released thanks to the intervention of Erica's producer, Andre goes unhappily to a staged bachelor party in a strip club. Chelsea catches up with him there and persuades him to try stand-up again. Re-energised, Andre heads back to the airport, but stops when he finds Chelsea's shoe in his gift bag.

The Treatment

The Netherlands/Belgium 2014
Director: Hans Herbots

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

Idyllic slow-motion images show two little boys playing by a woodland railway track, while a voiceover reads letters outlining the conflicting, equally abominable accounts of the younger child's subsequent fate.

The opening sequence of Hans Herbots's harrowing police procedural *The Treatment* visually tracks the thin line that runs between past and present, between Edenic childhood and its bitter end. The voice that we hear belongs to Ivan Plettinckx (Johan van Assche), a local paedophile and chief suspect in the abduction and disappearance of young Bjorn Cafmeyer; 25 years on, Plettinckx still taunts Bjorn's older brother Nick (Geert van Rampelberg) with letters about the unsolved crime. Now a driven, haunted chief inspector unable to move on from the loss of his brother, Nick discerns in a bizarre new paedophile case (whose male survivors are too ashamed to speak of the horrific choices they have been forced to make) a possible connection to his own past. Caught between then and now, Nick is in such a hurry to exorcise the ghosts of his past that he tragically struggles to see what's right in front of him.

Like the contradictory letters that Plettinckx sends Nick, several clashing elements vie to shape the narrative of *The Treatment*. The tree-climbing, family-abducting, child-biting perpetrator at the centre of the film has come to be mythologised by local children as 'the troll', setting the film up as a modern fairytale (set in deep dark woods, no less). Conversely, the story has been adapted quite closely (by Carl Joos) from Mo Hayder's 2001 DI Jack Caffery novel of the same name, and to a lesser degree from that novel's predecessor *Birdman* (2000). Yet if the model for Hayder's brand of detective fiction is sickening excess of the kind popularised by Thomas Harris in his Hannibal Lecter novels, then the sensationalism inherent in the story of *The Treatment* is greatly tempered by two other influences. First, having previously directed the Swedish co-production *The Spiral* (2012) for television, Herbots imbues *The Treatment* with a brooding sensibility and



The haunting: Ina Geerts, Geert van Rampelberg

sombre lyricism reminiscent of 'Nordic noir': the lighting is subdued, the presentation restrained, and unimaginable acts are left to the imagination, while their after-effects ripple through time. Second, in transposing the events of Hayder's novels from England to Belgium, Joos blends imported materials with domestic realities, with several details from the true crimes of notorious Belgian paedophile Marc Dutroux casting their shadow over events here (especially the human cages, and the dehydration/starvation of captives while their abductor is otherwise engaged). This has uncomfortable resonances for a nation still stinging from a collective feeling of shame at the length of time it took to arrest and convict a murderous paedophile in its midst.

Indeed, despite the unconscionable acts that Nick uncovers, shame rather than shock is key to *The Treatment*. Nick's shame at his inability to find, let alone save, his baby brother; the shame the troll's adult victims feel at their paralysis or even complicity; and the troll's own shame at his condition. If Nick finally learns to let go of Bjorn and turn his back on the past, a bleak coda, deviating from Hayder's books but uncomfortably matching the actualities of the Dutroux case, suggests the high cost of his own self-chosen treatment. The opening vision of paradise is forever lost. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Peter Bouckaert
Screenplay
Carl Joos
Based on the novel
written by Mo Hayder
Cinematography
Frank van den Eeden
Editor
Philippe Raivoet
Art Director
Johan van Essche
Music
Wiegelt, Meirmans
& Klaassen
Sound
Quentin Collette
Costumes
Nathalie Leborgne

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Phanta Film
Production Companies
Eyeworks presents in
co-production with
Phanta Vision, VTM
with the support

of Het Vlaams
Audiovisueel Fonds,
Screen Flanders,
Het Agentschap
Ondernemen,
Het Nederlands
Filmfonds, La Wallonie
et la Région de
Bruxelles-Capitale, De
Belgische Tax Shelter
voor Filmfinanciering,
Vlaanderen in
Actie and VAF in
collaboration with
Kinepolis Film
Distribution, Telenet

Cast
Geert van Rampelberg
Nick Cafmeyer
Ina Geerts
Danni Petit
Johan van Assche
Ivan Plettinckx
Laura Verlinden
Steffi Vankerhove

Dominique van Malder
Roland Claeren
Kyan Steverlynck
Joff Vankerhove
Roel Swanenberg
Hans Vankerhove
Ingrid de Vos
Nancy Lammers
Michael Vergauwen
Chris Gommaer
Circé Lethem
Iris Kryotom
Brit van Hoof
Cindy Simons
Tibo Vandenborre
Alex Simons

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Peccadillo
Pictures Ltd

Belgian theatrical title
De Behandelings

Antwerp, Belgium, present day. A figure known to local children as 'the troll' has imprisoned the Simons family in their home for days and, when interrupted, has stolen off into a woodland area with their young son Robin. Robin's corpse is found in a tree, bearing semen from his father Alex and bite marks from someone else.

Chief Inspector Nick Cafmeyer suspects a connection with Ivan Plettinckx, chief suspect in the disappearance of Nick's own younger brother Bjorn 25 years earlier. Breaking into Plettinckx's house just as the old man hangs himself, Nick finds a cache of videotapes showing young Bjorn's abuse by a paedophile ring. A woman's tattoo glimpsed on a videotape leads Nick to Nancy Lammers, who offers information in exchange for payment and the incriminating videotapes. Meanwhile Chris Gommaer reluctantly comes forward as a witness, revealing that years earlier he was similarly forced by the troll to sodomise his own son. Nancy ties up Bjorn, alive but brain-damaged, in a caravan, but before she can hand him to Nick, she is arrested by Nick's colleague Danni. Nick tracks and violently arrests the troll, an impotent, delusional loner. Bjorn remains undiscovered.

The Tribe

Ukraine/The Netherlands 2014
Director: Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy
Certificate 18 131m 43s

See Feature
on page 42

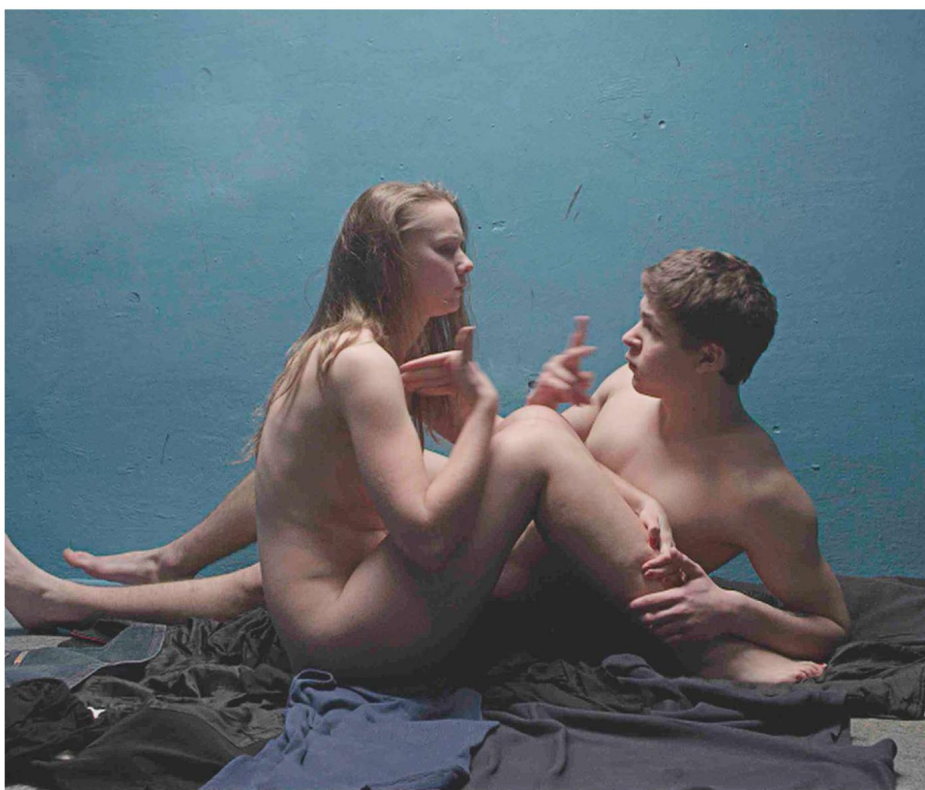
Reviewed by Adam Nayman

In his feature debut *The Tribe*, Ukrainian filmmaker Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy directs like a brilliant student who has absorbed the lessons of his tutors – Haneke, the Dardennes and numerous New-Wave Romanians. Staged as a series of long-shot long takes alternating between fixed-camera tableaux and implacable tracking shots – with the only cuts coming in between sequences – *The Tribe* is a *tour de force* and it knows it. The scenes don't seem to have been directed so much as arranged on a platter. And, given the prevalence of revenge in the film's plot, it should be said that they're served up absolutely ice-cold.

Introduced stepping off a bus in suburban Kiev, Sergey (Grigoriy Fesenko) is a deaf-mute teenager who's been enrolled at – or banished to – a boarding school where students and staff are all similarly disabled. There is no spoken dialogue in the film, nor any subtitles to translate the conversations between the characters, which unfolds entirely in Ukrainian sign language. This is a daring gambit, of course, and like the virtuosic camerawork it feels halfway between a fully integrated ethical-aesthetic choice and an ingenious gimmick – a means of distinguishing *The Tribe* from even the most effectively alienating arthouse fare on the market. The combination of meticulously distanced camera placement (the only close-ups come when characters wander up to the lens) and determinedly opaque dramaturgy is such that the viewer feels either held at arm's length or else infected with an illicit, vicarious curiosity. Either way, the director gets his desired effect: this is one uncomfortable movie.

The question is whether Slaboshpytskiy is mobilising this discomfort or simply exploiting it. An early sequence in which the students are presented in class with a map of Europe seems to suggest a lurking domestic allegory, and the strategic placement of Ukrainian flags within the frame over the course of the film encourages this reading. The boarding school is presented as a self-contained ecosystem lorded over by older boys who bully their peers into submission and teachers who go even further: Sergey discovers that the woodwork instructor runs a prostitution business on the side, and ends up helping to pimp out his classmates at an isolated truck stop. It's not too difficult to infer a political perspective within this vision of unregulated corruption – a state-of-the-nation address that nobody dares speak aloud.

At the same time, there's something a little unseemly in how enthusiastically *The Tribe* goes for the jugular when it comes to extreme imagery. The explicit, real-time sex scenes between Sergey and his reluctant new girlfriend Anya (Yana Novikova), who works as a hooker, are superbly choreographed and acted, and yet it feels as if what we're observing is less an authentic exchange than a carefully conceived set piece. (When Sergey and Anya lie together framed against a dingy wall, the horizontal planes of the composition evoke Rothko.) That goes double for the scenes of violence, which are so skilfully achieved that the horror is crowded out by a perverse sense of admiration for what Slaboshpytskiy and his collaborators



The naked spur: Yana Novikova, Grygoriy Fesenko

have accomplished. (The literally bludgeoning finale is likely to be cited for years to come by connoisseurs of austere master-shot brutality – it's the equal of the throat-cutting in *Hidden*.)

In truth, pretty much every single thing about *The Tribe* is impressive, from the delineation of space within the school (the roving shots through long, narrow corridors are right out of *The Shining*) to the careful calibration of the sound design (small noises resound in the absence of dialogue) to the intensely gestural performances of the non-professional cast. And the place it occupies in the history of cinematic depictions of deafness

is singular: there's something authentically progressive about making a film in which deaf characters are not only not idealised but depicted as venal and even evil, as well as resourceful, sexually voracious and fiercely protective and loyal. But it can also be enervating to watch a prodigy show off so unabashedly. Slaboshpytskiy approaches filmmaking as a contact sport, and in the process transforms audiences into Olympic-style judges, with scorecards held at the ready. He belongs on the podium but it'll be interesting to see if next time out he insists on playing a game that he's clearly already mastered. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Valentyn Vasyanovych
Iya Myslytska
Written by
Myroslav
Slaboshpytskiy
**Director of
Photography**
Valentyn Vasyanovych
Film Editor
Valentyn Vasyanovych
Production Design
Vlad Oduenko
Sound Design
Sergiy Stepanskyi
Costume Design
Olena Gres

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Ukrainian State
Film Agency
**Production
Companies**
Developed with
the support of the
Hubert Bals Fund of
International Film
Festival Rotterdam

With the support
of Ukrainian State
Film Agency,
Rinat Akhmetov's
Foundation
Executive Producers
Olexiy Karpenko
Andriy Nebesnyi
Olexandra Kostina

Cast
Grygoriy Fesenko
Sergey
Yana Novikova
Anya
Roza Babyi
Svetka
**Olexandr
Dziadevych**
Gera
Olexandr Osadchyi
King
Ivan Tyshko
Makar
Olexandr Sidelnikov
Shnyr
Olexandr Panivan
woodwork teacher

Kyryl Koshyk
sponsor
Tetyana Radchenko
principal
Lyudmyla Rudenko
history teacher
Maryna Panivan
Nora

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Metrodome
Distribution Ltd

Ukrainian
theatrical title
Plemya

Kiev, the present. Sergey arrives at a boarding school for deaf pupils and is quickly initiated into a student gang overseen by a woodwork teacher who keeps his activities secret from the school's administrators. The gang dabbles in everything from petty theft to prostitution. Sergey swiftly moves up the ranks; when a young man who helps pimp out the female students is accidentally killed, Sergey takes his position. He begins to develop feelings for Anna, who is the girlfriend of one of the other boys; he offers her money for sex and afterwards they begin a clandestine relationship. The woodwork teacher has a plan to send Anna and her friend Svetka to Italy, but Anna discovers that she's pregnant and gets an abortion without telling Sergey, who has a plan of his own to flee. Using a mallet that he made in woodwork class, he attacks the woodwork teacher and steals his money. His scheme seems to be proceeding smoothly until Sergey sees Anna with her new visa and grabs it, tearing it apart and swallowing it in an attempt to stop her leaving. He's dragged away by the other boys, beaten with a broken bottle and left for dead. Later, seemingly unharmed, Sergey returns to the dormitory and crushes his enemies' heads with heavy wooden bookcases while they sleep.

We Are Monster

Director: Antony Petrou
Certificate 15 84m 58s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

In March 2000, a teenage British-Asian prisoner in Feltham Young Offenders Institution was killed by his cellmate, a known racist called Robert Stewart. Whether the two were banged up together as a sadistic joke by the prison staff was never proved, although it's clear that warnings about the dangerous situation (including a plea from the young Asian himself) were casually dismissed as trivial by the Feltham authorities. Antony Petrou's dramatisation begins with the murder, with Stewart standing over the blood-soaked body of his victim, and then flashes back six weeks to his admission to the jail.

At the heart of Petrou's film lies the unsettling performance of Leeshon Alexander as Stewart. Or rather, three performances – since along with providing the script, Alexander also gives us two versions of the psychotic young man, splitting him Gollum-style and staging long conversations between the twin aspects. Stewart One (the 'real' Stewart, if you like, visible and audible to those around him) is the more compliant and impressionable persona, reacting with a mixture of eagerness and apprehension to his doppelganger's insidious urgings; Stewart Two (the 'imaginary' one, whom only Stewart One can see) is the more dominant, reminding his alter ego how he's been mistreated ("They've been fucking you since the day you were born, they all 'ave") and egging him on to take vicarious revenge on the softest target available, his unfortunate cellmate Zahid Mubarek. Alexander effectively differentiates his two personas, lending Stewart Two a more relaxed stance and a direct, almost humorous gaze as he taunts and goads his alter ego into his final act of violence, while Stewart One slouches shifty-eyed, with worse skin and an air of victimhood.

We Are Monster stands or falls on Alexander's double performance, since he dominates the running time and we're never shown much beyond the superficials of the other characters. Mubarek (Ayman Hamdouchi) is presented as a likeable, harmless kid, jailed for stealing £6 worth of razor blades, and the wardens are a series of



One plus one: Leeshon Alexander

attitudes, from the mildly sympathetic but lazy PO Shah, whose cursory cell searches overlook the sharpened wooden stake that Stewart has secreted, to the chief officer who contemptuously dismisses Mubarek's concerns ("We're almost at breaking point and I've gotta deal with a whining Paki") and persistently sees the situation as "not my problem". Dr Edwards, the psychiatrist whom we see the young Stewart taken to visit in flashback, is caricatured to the point of farce.

Despite its brief running time, the film sometimes feels repetitive – we get a few too many scenes of Stewart sitting in the prison canteen, glaring resentfully at the young black guys laughing uproariously at the next table – and its limited budget sometimes obtrudes: flashbacks are literally projected on to the walls of the cell. But the camerawork is tellingly restrained, not succumbing to hysterical zip pans and flash-cutting but tracking slowly and deliberately down the antiseptic corridors of the institute, building a sense of incipient menace; and though this is very much a film about violence, the violence is implied but never shown.

In the end *We Are Monster* derives its impact from a sense of contained anger: that neglect and indifference could allow something like this to happen, with no responsibility admitted and seemingly no lessons learnt. Ⓢ

Woman in Gold

USA/United Kingdom 2015
Director: Simon Curtis
Certificate 12A 108m 53s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

Director Simon Curtis has solid form both with period pieces (TV's *David Copperfield*) and true stories (*My Week with Marilyn*) but has less success with this historical court-case drama. The ingredients hold promise: a famous painting (Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*), a beloved star (Helen Mirren) and a bitter court case, in which Mirren's character Maria Altmann attempts to reclaim the painting, which was seized from her family by the Nazis. Cue wartime flashbacks and odd-couple comedy as headstrong Maria and her lawyer (Ryan Reynolds) bicker and bond their way towards a resolution.

Thematically, it's a lot to juggle, and Curtis's approach feels slightly heavy-handed. Mirren brings a humorous haughtiness to the role but even her performance is mannered, perhaps stifled by a stilted script. *Woman in Gold* is at its most affecting when showing the escape of the young Maria (Tatiana Maslany) from Vienna; the subsequent dispute about a painting, however symbolic, seems almost trivial in comparison. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
David M. Thompson
Kris Thykier
Written by
Alexi Kaye Campbell
Based on the life stories of E. Randol Schoenberg and Maria Altmann
Inspired by the documentary 'Stealing Klimt'
Director of Photography
Ross Emery
Editor
Peter Lambert
Production Designer
Jim Clay
Music
Martin Phipps
Hans Zimmer
Sound Recordist
Richard Dyer
Costume Designer
Beatrix Pasztor

Produced by Origin Pictures Limited
Executive Producers
Christine Langan
Harvey Weinstein
Negeen Yazdi
Robert Walak
Ed Wethered
Alan Yentob
Ed Rubin
Simon Curtis
Tim Jackson

Jonathan Pryce
Chief Justice
Rehnquist

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

Cast

Helen Mirren
Maria Altmann
Ryan Reynolds
Randol Schoenberg, 'Randy'
Daniel Brühl
Hubertus Czernin
Katie Holmes
Pam Schoenberg
Tatiana Maslany
young Maria Altmann
Max Irons
Fritz Altmann
Charles Dance
Sherman
Antje Traue
Adele Bloch-Bauer
Elizabeth McGovern
Judge Florence Cooper

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Production Companies
The Weinstein Company and BBC
Films present an Origin Pictures production

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Leeshon Alexander
Antony Petrou
Producers
Dean O'Toole
Jean Pierre Magro
Noel Clarke
Jason Maza
Phil Dore
Written by
Leeshon Alexander
Director of Photography
Simon Richards
Editor
James Norris
Production Designer
Simon Rogers
Composer
Fred Portelli
Sound Recordist
Chris Ashworth
Costume Designer
Nadine Powell

Production Companies
Terra Rossa Films

Entertainment presents in association with Unstoppable Entertainment, Immortal Transmedia, 11littlefilms
Executive Producers
James Taylor
Roxanna Ramtin
Aaron Sawyer
John Smith

Cast

Leeshon Alexander
Robert Stewart
Ayman Hamdouchi
Zahid Mubarek
Gethin Anthony
Maurice Travis
Justin Salinger
Chief Officer Dean
Doug Allen
Officer Poll
Shazad Latif
Officer Shah
Drew Edwards

Officer Hart
Rob Swinton
Dr Edwards
James Hyland
father
Jennifer Aries
mother
Sean Sagar
Derrick James

In Colour

Distributor
Shear Entertainment

Feltham Young Offenders Institution, West London, February 2000. Twenty-year-old Robert Stewart is admitted to the jail and placed in a cell with 19-year-old British Asian Zahid Mubarek. Stewart, who is white, holds long conversations with his imaginary doppelganger and refuses to talk to Mubarek. Stewart's double constantly goads him into more extreme behaviour, urging him to hate his black and Asian fellow inmates and reminding him of incidents in his past, especially his abused childhood. Under his double's influence, Stewart starts to fashion a chunk of wood, wrenched from the underside of the table, into a weapon. Casual cell searches by the guards fail to find it. Some of the guards, noticing the strangeness of Stewart's behaviour, bring their concerns to the chief warden, but he dismisses their worries as trivial and not his responsibility. Mubarek is increasingly spooked by Stewart's behaviour. He asks to be moved to a different cell but his request is denied. A few hours before Mubarek is due for release, Stewart kills him.

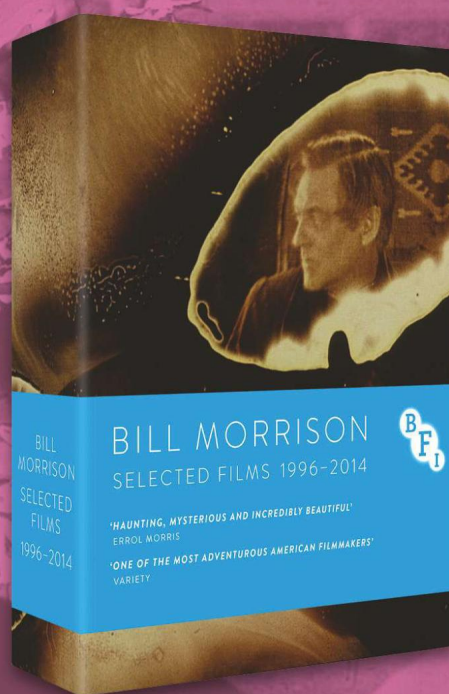
End titles tell us that Stewart was sentenced to life imprisonment but that none of the Feltham guards has ever been disciplined over Mubarek's death.

Los Angeles, late 1990s. Maria Altmann, who fled Vienna during WWII, persuades lawyer Randol Schoenberg to help her retrieve a family painting that was seized by the Nazis. It is Gustav Klimt's famous 'Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I', a portrait of Maria's Aunt Adele, otherwise known as the 'Woman in Gold'. The Austrian government is unwilling to acknowledge Maria's ownership and refuses to move the painting from the Belvedere Gallery. When Maria travels to Austria with Schoenberg, it triggers flashbacks of her aunt, her wedding in Vienna and her painful separation from her parents as she and her husband fled the country. After years of legal wrangling and Austrian opposition, Schoenberg suggests filing a lawsuit in the US under the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act. In 2006, the arbitration panel rules that Austria is legally required to return the art to Maria.



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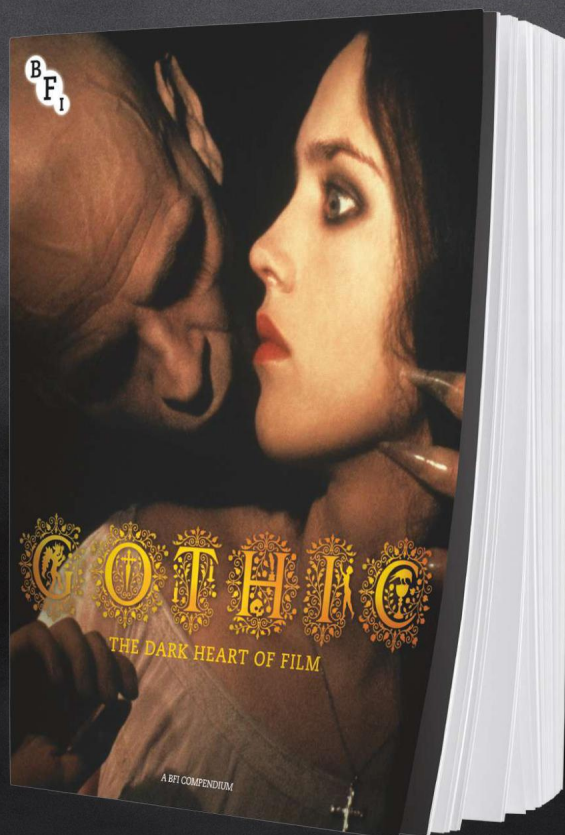
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Home cinema



Signs of the times: Lee Kang-sheng (left) in Tsai Ming-liang's *Stray Dogs*

STUFF HAPPENS

Unrestrained by story or plot, Tsai Ming-liang's fever dream of a film is as beguiling as it is mysterious and unsettling

STRAY DOGS/ JOURNEY TO THE WEST

Tsai Ming-liang; Taiwan 2013/14; New Wave/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 138/56 minutes; Features: masterclass with Tsai Ming-liang filmed at the Cinémathèque française

Reviewed by Adrian Martin

Near the middle of *Stray Dogs* there is an odd, inexplicable tableau that sums up, in its blackly comic way, much of the cinema of Tsai Ming-liang. An adult woman (Lu Yi-ching) and a young girl (Lee Li-chieh) – many viewers will take them, by this point, to be mother and daughter – stand and shiver in the spacious freezer-room situated behind the supermarket where the woman works. Why do they bother to hang out here, in this inhospitable space? We will never know, and the answer does not matter.

Tsai uses the setting and the situation, as he often does, for a spot of performance or 'action' art – a ritual gesture to be enacted. The adult

keeps trying to move closer to the child, as if to embrace her affectionately and offer some warmth (is this, indeed, why she has brought her small companion here?) – and the child keeps stepping away, to the side, as if resisting the offer. After some excruciatingly painful repetitions of this *pas de deux*, Tsai simply cuts to the next, narratively unconnected scene.

"The structure of the film has no beginning and no end," declares Tsai – placing *Stray Dogs* on the level of the various pieces of performance theatre and installation art that he has undertaken during his career. And indeed, the film gives the impression less of a 'scrambled' plot, Tarantino-style, than of one that has been dreamt up in an agonisingly protracted fever. Certain 'figures', such as the characters of a father (Lee Kang-sheng) and his two kids (with Lee Yi-cheng as the boy), recur – we see them walk, eat, sleep, play on a shoreline. Some incidents also recur, and even develop somewhat: the father holds an advertising sign in the street, until he quits – but then carries the sign around with him for a little longer. Some settings change drastically, and without warning: the family settles and resettles in what appear to be various abandoned rooms and building sites across Taipei.

Stray Dogs is, in this sense, a shining example of the type of hyper-modern text that the American critic Jonathan Rosenbaum detected, embryonically, in certain sequences of Olivier Assayas's *Irma Vep* (1996): the film as an unconscious brain, in the process of conjuring or dreaming itself into existence, shard by shard.

Tsai has often played with reality shifts and logic leaps of this sort – though never so radically as in *Stray Dogs*. The ending of his apocalyptic musical *The Hole* (1998) showed us a flagrant impossibility, a contradiction of the physical reality so relentlessly laid out in the preceding scenes: a woman being raised up to join her man through a tiny gap in the ceiling. The beginning of *What Time Is It There?* (2001) evokes an apparition of a man in his home that can never be securely placed, in its temporality or its reality status, in relation to what follows. *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* (2006) closed on a lyrical, blissful vision of its three central characters asleep on a mattress floating on water – which may be an image of collective death or the redemptive fantasy of a dysfunctional society's material detritus transformed into its most luxurious comfort.

Stray Dogs pushes these sorts of essential mysteries much further. It could be used as a

'control test' on viewers to determine how, and to what extent, they are conventionally compelled to forge coherent narrative links among a film's given elements. Casual viewers and professional critics alike have offered accounts of *Stray Dogs* that appear not to have noticed three different actors in the 'mother' role (Lu, Yang Kuei-mei and Chen Shiang-chyi), one of whom is clearly older than the other two. Some have perceived (or projected) narrative links that are clearly absent, such as assuming certain scenes to be the father's memory flashbacks.

The credit – unusual in Tsai's cinema – to three screenwriters gives a clue as to the film's origin and its processes. Tsai has related how the project began with a script sent to him "about middle-age unemployment and domestic violence". This resonated with him in terms of a sight he had long witnessed on the streets of Taipei: the 'human billboards' who held up advertisements for hours on end, even in the most extreme weather conditions. From that point, beginning with the basic sketch of a narrative situation involving an itinerant, homeless, broken family, Tsai's aim was "get rid of the story" at every phase of the production.

Yet Tsai's own stated intention does not quite capture what really happens in the film. It is never simply a matter of negating or deconstructing the storyline, as in some Brecht-inspired campaign to 'shatter the illusion'. Tsai's cinema is, on the contrary, completely immersive in its emotional effect: we fully enter a world, no matter how radically discontinuous from site to site and shot to shot this world may be. (More than in any of his previous films, Tsai's sense of an 'imaginary psychogeography' here rivals the surrealism of David Lynch.)

It is easy to wrap the manifest content of *Stray Dogs* up with currently intellectually modish terms such as 'precarity' or 'bare life'. Tsai achieves something more integral: this film about the pervasive social experience of unsettlement and dispossession completely unsettles and dispossesses the viewer at the fundamental levels on which she or he makes sense of what is seen, heard and understood. It is a rich essay on *belonging*: what object or property belongs to anyone, and what two elements in a story ever belong together? Tsai's cinema, for all its bleakness, emanates a beguiling, poetic aura of hope: if our world and its stories are truly in ruins, then its scattered pieces can belong to us all, democratically.

Many accounts of Tsai's work make it sound rigidly schematic and systematic: all static shots, all in long takes! Both *Stray Dogs* and *Journey to the West* – the second entry in Tsai's *Walker* series featuring Lee Kang-sheng as an ultra-slow-moving monk, also included on this New Wave release – show up the fallacy of such reductive

This film about the experience of unsettlement and dispossession completely unsettles and dispossesses the viewer



Stray Dogs

caricature. Tsai and his cinematographers pan when they have to or want to (as, for instance, when they follow Lee down a long flight of stairs in *Journey*); and the duration of images can last anywhere from under a minute to 14 minutes (as in the already notorious penultimate shot of *Stray Dogs*), in no clear or predictable pattern of alternation. In fact, Tsai's style, within its pre-set parameters, is remarkably flexible.

Journey to the West also plays with the hint or shadow of a narrative – but without the same gravity as *Stray Dogs*. Lee and Denis Lavant seem to begin (judging from the overlapping soundtrack) in the same cave or womb-like interior space. As Lee moves up the stairs and out into the world – his goal is to keep walking forward, no matter what – Lavant appears (in the film's fourth shot) to be dreaming the monk's presence, far in the hilly background. Eventually, Lavant pops up on the crowded streets of Marseille, following his 'master' and proving for us – as Chaplin and Keaton once did – that exact mimicry is among comedy's greatest and most enduring mechanisms.

Journey is, in its own terms, a perfect Tsai work, a small gem. It mixes both a species of hyperrealism – precisely documenting, as in a Straub-Huillet film, the movement of light or the sound of the wind – and a sense of surrealist marvel, as in the shot of a museum-roof reflection flipped upside down, thus suggesting that the sky begins at ground level, where a body of water is abruptly bisected.

No matter what is happening in or to the image, however, everyday life keeps streaming by: people walk on, oblivious, or gawk for a moment at the performers or the camera. Tsai (after judicious editing) accepts all the fluctuations, all the accidents. It is his Zen wisdom at its most paradoxical height. As in an earlier video, *A Conversation with God* (2001), some measure of serenity is found at the heart of a truly chaotic, messed-up urban world.

Although Tsai has announced that *Stray Dogs* will be his last work for cinema, as he concentrates on gallery pieces or simply living a happy life, perhaps the comparative success, on the specialist circuits, of this film and *Journey to the West* will convince him to keep moving on, into the unknown. Contemporary cinema would certainly be far poorer without him. 

New releases

ABUSE OF WEAKNESS

Catherine Breillat; France 2013; Strand Releasing/Region 1 DVD; 105 minutes; 16:9 anamorphic; Features: Catherine Breillat interview, short film 'The Future of Cinema...'; trailers

Reviewed by David Thompson

"All my films are about myself," says Catherine Breillat in an interview included on this DVD release of her most recent feature, not seen in the UK outside the London Film Festival. Since the beginning of her controversial career, Breillat has written semi-autobiographical novels that have subsequently taken on a cinematic form.

Abuse of Weakness sees Isabelle Huppert portraying strong-willed director Maud, whose desire to cast a real-life con artist as an abusive man in a film about a tragic relationship leads her into massive personal debt. But in this instance, the book that preceded the movie, Breillat's *Abus de faiblesse* (a French legal term), addressed a real incident in her life, when she sought out Christophe Rocancourt, a charming self-professed swindler, to play a role in a film entitled *Bad Love* opposite Naomi Campbell. Rocancourt became an insistent partner in the project and extracted almost €1 million from her. Eventually Breillat won her case against him, but in her book she makes it clear that she was entirely complicit in the actions that almost ruined her.

Breillat's personal and perverse 'love story' is further complicated by a debilitating stroke that she suffered in 2004. In *Abuse of Weakness*, she dramatises this incident, and the fearless Huppert is seen embodying all her bodily contortions and feebleness with extraordinary conviction. But what the actress also conveys, not through obvious impersonation but more by attitude, is the fiery, indomitable will of a director who has refused to allow this affliction to stall her career. For the Rocancourt role, Breillat again chose a non-actor who personified for her a dangerously attractive alpha male, the French rapper Kool Shen.

The style of the film is in Breillat's cool and controlled mode, with fine attention to details of colour and decor and no attempt to gain emotional sympathy through excessive use of music, camera movement or editing. As Breillat points out in the interview here, there are none of the expected raw, challenging sex scenes that were once her trademark, as the relationship she describes is more about an intense mental attraction between the ill-matched protagonists. At the close of the film, Maud has to face her aggrieved family with the consequences of her financial recklessness, and can only repeat that "It was me but it was not me." This extraordinary moment – which boldly links the psychology of the main character to the creative act we are witnessing – concludes one of Breillat's most achieved and complex films, and one of Huppert's finest performances.

Disc: A fine transfer with excellent, clear subtitles. 

New releases



BLOOD AND BLACK LACE

Mario Bava; Italy 1964; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 89 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: audio commentary by Tim Lucas, 'Psycho Analysis'; appreciation by Hélène Cattet and Bruno Forzani, 'Yellow' neo-giallo, 'Gender and Giallo' visual essay, panel discussion, 'The Sinister Image: Cameron Mitchell', alternative US opening titles, original theatrical trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Kim Newman

From the opening shot (a red couturier's sign swinging in the wind) to the closing (a dangling red telephone receiver), Mario Bava's 1964 shocker *Blood and Black Lace* is a sumptuous, delirious, transgressive exercise.

When a masked, slouch-hatted killer stalks a succession of catty, elegant models associated with the House of Morlacchi, gruesomely mutilating and murdering them with gimmick weaponry (a medieval spiked glove, a stove that glows hot as a blast furnace), the police suspect that one of the jittery degenerates associated with the fashion business is a crazed sex killer. Story elements evoke the much filmed thrillers of Edgar Wallace and Agatha Christie, including the tricky reveal that the killer is two different people in one disguise and that – despite the film's embrace of sado-erotic horror in the stylish, titillating stalk-and-kill scenes – they aren't even crazy but are simply murdering to secure an ill-gotten fortune. If there's a compulsion to destroy beauty at the heart of this horror, it's on the part of the director and, by extension, the audience.

Whereas a Hitchcockian thriller depends on audience identification, even with characters who turn out to be more dangerous than endangered, Bava presents a cast of folks no one could care about. The murdered women are uniformly immoral, greedy and hard-faced, while the male suspects are a line-up of grotesque red herrings. The striking opening titles position the cast next to distinctive wicker-frame figures, establishing that the characters are all puppets of the plot. Carlo Rustichelli's jaunty, sinuous score accompanies their *Ronde*-like dance as they scheme and squirm their way along their respective paths, while Bava's camera prowls after them through multilayered sets. Scenes of murder, intrigue or just plain standing around are shot gorgeously, with rich red and blue lighting gels. It's sensationalist and sadistic, but also seductive and strangely engaging. **Disc:** A plethora of contextualising extras, but the real draw is the stunning Blu-ray transfer, which shows off Bava's exquisite framing and extraordinary use of colour gels.

FILMS BY VERA CHYTILOVA

FRUIT OF PARADISE

Czechoslovakia/Belgium 1969; Second Run/Region 0 DVD; 95 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: booklet, 'Ceiling'

TRAPS

Czechoslovakia 1998; Second Run/Region 0 DVD; 116 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: booklet

Reviewed by Brad Stevens

Although she was perhaps the most important of all Czech filmmakers, Vera Chytilová has been ill served by DVD distributors, with only *Daisies* (1966) previously being available on disc in the UK, thanks to the enterprising Second Run label. Now, in the wake of a revelatory BFI retrospective,



Murder à la mode: *Blood and Black Lace*

Second Run has added two Chytilová titles to its catalogue, with more to come.

Fruit of Paradise, Chytilová's follow-up to *Daisies*, shares its predecessor's surrealist logic and abstract imagery. Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden serves as the prologue to a narrative in which married couple Josef and Eva are tempted by a serpent-like serial killer, and here Chytilová references not just the biblical tale but also several other myths dealing with problematically assertive female behaviour: Little Red Riding Hood, Pandora's Box, Alice in Wonderland, Bluebeard. Even Murnau's *Nosferatu* is thrown into the mix, with Eva sacrificing herself in order to lure the 'monster' to his doom. But Eva is a strikingly modern figure, insisting that she has the right to engage in sexual relations with both of the men who are fighting for possession of her. Consistently associated with movement and last seen as a blur, she resists all boundaries and definitions, and the *mise en scène* – which makes little distinction between bodies, shapes, colours and textures – suggests how closely Chytilová's worldview matches that of her heroine.

At least superficially, *Traps* is a very different proposition: a black comedy full of double entendres, about a female vet who castrates two rapists. 'Revenge for rape' films generally take a negative view of men, and since Chytilová's earlier work often reveals a similar attitude, it is easy to understand why she felt no need to subvert this subgenre (which provided another myth of problematic female behaviour), instead making its concerns and motifs serve her own ends. The result is an unlikely combination of *I Spit on Your Grave* and the *Carry On* series (with perhaps a dash of Almodóvar), which certainly deserves more attention than it has so far received.

Disc: Both transfers are excellent. The main extra is Chytilová's remarkable graduation film *Ceiling*, included with *Paradise*.

DAY OF ANGER

Tonino Valerii; Italy 1967; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 86/114 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: interviews, deleted scene, theatrical trailers, booklet

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Tonino Valerii's Italian western unusually combines the mythic characterisations frequently found in the genre with a more nuanced,

complicated vision of society and violence. It has as much in common with American rotten-town/violent-outsider films such as *Warlock* (1959) and *Welcome to Hard Times* (1967) as it does with the primal style of Sergio Leone.

Fatherless street-cleaner Scott Mary (Giuliano Gemma), abused and exploited in the tidily hypocritical town of Clifton, becomes apprentice to bad man Frank Talby (Lee Van Cleef), who teaches him the ruthless rules by which he lives. Talby plans vengeance on Clifton's leading citizens, which involves muscling in on their businesses rather than simply gunning them down. As he corrupts and exploits his protégé, Talby also encourages a revival of the violent times the West has outgrown. When he buys up a store's entire supply of dusty bullets, he advises the proprietor to order more since they're about to become a popular item.

Gemma's Scott is a rare spaghetti-western hero with a character arc. Under Talby's tutelage, the naive, shit-stained janitor turns into a preening, sneering gunman, though Walter Rilla's old-time lawman tries to redeem him, explaining how Talby has stacked the deck to remain in control (sawing two inches off his gun gives him a faster draw). Inevitably, the finale finds the master confronted by the pupil but the outcome is deeply ambiguous. The secondary characters are all thin archetypes (especially the decorative dancehall girls), but Gemma, Van Cleef and Rilla are impressive. It's set in the early 20th century, in a tamed West of pot plants and watered lawns: Talby tries to bring back the wild days with a memorably hideous saloon which features giant guns on the frontage and gaudy art-nouveau designs inside.

Disc: A typically thorough Arrow Blu-ray/DVD package includes the original Italian version (114 minutes), with Italian and English soundtracks, and the English-language 'international' release (86 minutes); the single brief scene unique to the latter is also included as an extra.

FELLINI – SATYRICON

Federico Fellini; Italy 1969; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 130 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: trailer, archival images, booklet

Reviewed by Charlie Fox

Here's "Rome, before Christ, after Fellini", according to the coy poster, showing two menacing cherubs mid-clinch on a white horse. But such unholy promise turns curiously and curiously when you think of the director's classification of his film as "a science fiction of the past". The resulting adventure in the mythic underworld is a feast for strange desires and decadent monsters, led by Fellini's passion for the grotesque. Whatever his waning status, the untrammelled perversity of his imagination remains an astonishing thing to behold.

Satyricon is not so much an adaptation of its source text – Petronius's fragmentary Dionysian satire – as a marvellous CinemaScope conjuration of film as an altered state, luring you into its depths through a hallucinogenic flow of stories within stories. And by this point Fellini was orchestrating such adventures with a ringmaster's flair, breathlessly moving from nocturnal trysts in the catacombs to



MASTER OF THE MEDIUM

Horror and harmony are constantly juxtaposed in the domestic spaces of Dreyer's late films

THE CARL THEODOR DREYER COLLECTION

MASTER OF THE HOUSE/ DAY OF WRATH/ORDET/GERTRUD

Denmark 1925/43/55/64; BFI/Region B Blu-ray; 112/98/126/117 minutes; Certificate 12; 1.33:1/1.66:1; Features: documentaries ('My Métier', 'The Word and the Light', 'Carl Th. Dreyer and Gertrud'), commentary ('Day of Wrath'), visual essays ('The Cross'), archival interviews, critical overviews, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Whereas the BFI's recent Werner Herzog collection concentrated on the director's first two decades, its latest auteur-driven box-set covers Carl Th. Dreyer's last three. It includes everything he directed after *Vampyr* (1932), except for his two 1946 films: the director-disowned feature *Two People* and the sponsor-suppressed short *Water from the Land*. However, in ample compensation, the BFI has also included *Master of the House*, Dreyer's antepenultimate silent film and his first real international hit: its success in France led to the funding of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Hélène Falconetti, daughter of that film's star, makes a very welcome appearance among the many interviewees included here).

It also neatly sets the tone for the box-set as a whole, since all four features are either partially or primarily about the travails of women in societies that either undervalue or actively suppress their contribution. Not that downtrodden housewife Ida (Astrid Holm) is in the same boat as *Day of Wrath*'s alleged witch Herlofs Marte (Anne Svierkier), but she is nonetheless trapped in a psychologically abusive marriage as neglectful husband Viktor (Johannes Meyer) takes her completely for granted. The proto-feminist solution to her problem, arrived at via conspiracy between her mother and Viktor's former nanny, could almost fuel a sitcom, but the occasional lightheartedness is interspersed with Dreyer's abiding feel for domestic spaces and his awareness (far greater than Viktor's) of the thankless workload needed to maintain this impression of cosiness.

The later features are all set in similar spaces. Although *Day of Wrath* turns the clock back several centuries to a superstitious world where both the practice of unconventional medicine and the succumbing to adulterous passions provide *prima facie* evidence of witchcraft (at least according to the ruling misogynists), much of it is played out in stark interiors that look disconcertingly similar regardless of whether they're dwellings or torture chambers. Lyricism and horror are in constant juxtaposition (an outwardly idyllic landscape shows people gathering not winter fuel but kindling for the



World of interiors: *Master of the House*, one of Dreyer's late silents

judicial pyre) in a way that recalls *The Passion of Joan of Arc* and *Vampyr* while also anticipating the great medieval films of Ingmar Bergman, Robert Bresson and Jerzy Kawalerowicz: the latter's *Mother Joan of the Angels* (1961) has a similarly keen understanding of the sometimes fatally compromising overlaps between religion, social propriety and sexual desire.

Made almost a decade apart, Dreyer's final features *Ordet* and *Gertrud* show a marked refinement of his style, their lengthy takes sometimes lasting several minutes, their visual content stripped almost to the barest essentials. As Alain Resnais's later films also demonstrated, however, the effect isn't to make the material excessively theatrical (even though both originated as stage plays) but, rather, profoundly cinematic: the movement of actors, camera and lighting has been meticulously calibrated in advance, imbuing *Ordet*'s famously miraculous ending with an intensity that would be hard to match reliably in live performance.

These near-pristine high-definition restorations emphasise the attention to fine detail better than any previous video release, which especially benefits *Gertrud*'s favouring of medium shots over close-ups and *Ordet*'s setting among neighbouring communities with contrasting views (encapsulated by the delightfully evocative line, "You have a bright, jolly Christianity while we are undertakers and killjoys").

The BFI's set also includes seven government-sponsored documentary shorts. Despite their

All four features are about the travails of women in societies that undervalue or actively suppress their contribution

essentially propagandist (and, for Dreyer, family-supporting) purpose, these sometimes reveal a surprising amount of his creative personality – only *The Fight Against Cancer* (1947) is comparatively anonymous. The mother-and-child welfare theme of *Good Mothers* (1942) chimes well with *Master of the House*; *The Village Church* (1947) recycles costumes from *Day of Wrath* to illustrate the history of small Danish churches; *Thorvaldsen* (1949) makes memorably creative use of lighting to enliven a study of the work of sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen; *Storstrøm Bridge* (1950) and *A Castle Within a Castle* (1955) examine two of Denmark's more notable architectural achievements (Kronborg Castle is the subject of the latter). Most arrestingly of all, *They Caught the Ferry* (1948) combines an adrenaline-rush first-person motorcycle ride with imagery of death straight out of *Vampyr*: as an anti-speeding cautionary tale it packs a hefty punch even today.

The features are sourced from recent Danish restorations and the shorts are also in high definition, with the viewer offered the choice of Danish or English versions of *Master of the House* (intertitles), *Day of Wrath* (opening text) and Torben Skjød Jensen's documentary *My Métier* (voiceover). All mark very substantial advances on previous DVD editions, with the slower frame rate of *Master of the House* feeling truer to the material. Generous extras include not only everything featured on the BFI's earlier Dreyer DVDs but also the deleted interview footage from *My Métier* from the Criterion package and a fair bit besides; the booklet offers in-depth pieces on features and shorts alike. With contributors including Ove Brusendorff, Henning Camre, Tag Gallagher, Ilona Halberstadt, Philip Horne, Julian Jebb, Philip Kemp, Tom Milne, Jørgen Roos, Casper Tybjerg and Nick Wrigley, we're in very safe hands. **S**

HENRIETTE GOES BOATING

Renoir's depiction of a day in the country is full of painterly beauty and lyrical landscapes... but nature here is far from benign

A DAY IN THE COUNTRY

Jean Renoir; France 1936; Criterion Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 41 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: 1962 introduction by Jean Renoir, interview with Renoir scholar Christopher Faulkner about the film's production, video essay by Faulkner on Renoir's methods, 'Un tournage à la campagne' outtakes compilation, 1979 interview with producer Pierre Braunberger, screen tests, new English subtitles, essay by Gilberto Perez

Reviewed by Graham Fuller

Criterion's *A Day in the Country* (*Partie de campagne*) release includes the Cinémathèque française's revelatory assemblage of location outtakes (culled from four-and-a-half hours), screen tests, and an incisive video essay by the Renoir scholar Christopher Faulkner. He speculates that the film had been an attempt by Jean Renoir to come to an "oedipal resolution", or "reckoning", with his famous father.

The film was shot at Marlotte, south of the Fontainebleau forest and north of the Loing, where Pierre-Auguste Renoir had painted and where the neophyte director had made the barge melodrama *La Fille de l'eau* (1925), starring his wife (and Renoir père's former model) Catherine Hessling. Renoir replicated in *A Day in the Country* at least three of his father's paintings – *Boating on the Seine*, *Oarsmen at Chatou* and, most famously, *La Balançoire* ("The Swing") – as well as Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (sans nudity). Was this filial nostalgia, or is there anything more specifically oedipal about the film than the son's occupation of the father's artistic territory?

Based on a bitter short story by Guy de Maupassant (a friend of the painter), *A Day in the Country* depicts a petit-bourgeois Paris family's summer outing to a riverside café. While Monsieur Dufour (André Gabriello) and his apprentice Anatole (Paul Temps) – impotent buffoons probably modelled on Laurel and Hardy – are haplessly fishing, Madame Dufour (Jane Marken) and her 18-ish daughter Henriette (Sylvia Bataille) are caught by two unscrupulous boatmen. The merry mother has a guiltless fling with the raffish Rodolphe (Jacques Brunius, a playful Renoir satyr), while the vulnerable Henriette is seduced by his friend Henri (Georges D'Arnoux), a hypocrite who had earlier scolded Rodolphe for his irresponsible attitude to sex.

Though Monsieur Dufour, cuckolded by a younger man, and Madame Dufour, the erring wife, would make a fair Laius and Jocasta, Rodolphe is patently not Oedipus. There is, however, vestigial oedipalism in Henri's seizing of Henriette from the hapless Anatole, the emotionally blind and emasculate youth she will marry. Henriette too is blinded – by nature and a surge of desire – to her deflowering, which consigns her, a woman in love but

with no agency, to a passionless life. Renoir almost brutally corners her, as she innocently displays herself on the swing, with male gazes – from Henri and Rodolphe, from passing seminarians and even from small boys looking over a wall. (An outtake shows that Renoir filmed passing wagoners gawping at her too.) Having been entrapped by male attention, she returns a tearful, accusatory gaze at the audience in the film's surreal climactic close-up, seconds after Henri makes love to her.

An epilogue shows Henriette and Henri meeting several years later at the fateful islet spot. She has come there, surely hoping to see her seducer, with her husband, the oblivious Anatole. As she and Henri recall their tryst, he implies that he fell in love with her but was incapable of marrying. Her tears and pursed lips – a gesture Bataille practised in her screen test – upbraid him for loving and abandoning her, or for raping her. Ambivalent during their rapid courtship, at the crisis she tried to fight him off, her embracing him a spontaneous reaction to overwhelming sensations – her succumbing prefiguring Amy's in Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* (1971).

Shooting *A Day in the Country* was a holiday for Renoir, respite from making films (*Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*, *La Vie est à nous*) in support of the leftwing Popular Front, elected in May

Having been entrapped by male attention, Henriette returns a tearful, accusatory gaze at the audience

1936. But the production, begun in June of that year, was ruined by continuous rainfall. When producer Pierre Braunberger closed the set on 18 July and Renoir departed to start work on *Les Bas-fonds*, the 27-year-old Bataille raged at the director. She may have sensed – rightly, given her haunting performance – that she was losing her major shot at stardom.

Jacques Becker, who along with Henri Cartier-Bresson and Luchino Visconti had assisted Renoir, completed location shooting in the week of 8-15 August; an outtake from those days, of Bataille unsmilingly remarking that light is hitting the camera lens, reveals her disillusion. After the war, the initial montage having been destroyed by bombing, Braunberger had the film re-edited (with titles bridging the two missing scenes) and added Joseph Kosma's sympathetic score. By the time it emerged in May 1946, Bataille's moment was over.

Throughout, Renoir's lyrical panning shots of landscapes and travelling shots of foliage draping the water celebrate nature as seen in his father's *plein air* paintings. Yet Renoir is not being benign. Nature causes the frustrated Madame Dufour to complain of "ants" after being sexually rebuffed by her husband; nature stirs Henriette's inchoate feelings of tenderness, "a vague sort of yearning" that her mother tacitly recognises as sexual; nature impels Henri, once he has Henriette in his sights, to lie to Rodolphe and to himself that he is getting used to the idea of responsibility. It lasts only as long as the chase. The river – smooth, ruffled or strafed by rain – rolls on inexorably, as unchangeable as male and female biological imperatives, at least of the pre-feminist era. ☹



Tale of the riverbank: Jane Marken and Sylvia Bataille in *A Day in the Country*

New releases

 mysterious sea voyages via the slenderest narrative thread imaginable. The whole human carnival is here, too, including the Minotaur (a smouldering *ragazzo* in a mask), and a changeling princess who inhabits a bejewelled island alongside the expected company of maniacal gluttons and unsettling sylphs.

The first steps of the ice-cold erotic choreographies that populate Fellini's later *Casanova* are performed at an emperor's banquet amid the revelry of enchanted nudes and masked voyeurs. The mood has a gothic queasiness that often falls away into sheer, baffling nightmare, but at certain moments we also slip sideways into miniature tragedies that are all the more wounding for their deadened recital. What binds everything together is the intricately constructed ruin of Rome itself: the most thrilling way to experience *Satyricon* is as a primal vision of the city transformed into a sprawling fantasy, full of tales, wonders and terrors. From Béla Tarr to Guy Maddin, anyone depicting a deranged world is a reveller at the maestro's party.

Disc: A sumptuous 4K restoration.

52 PICK-UP

John Frankenheimer; USA 1986; Kino Lorber/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD: 110 minutes; 1.85:1

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

52 Pick-Up wasn't the first movie based on one of Elmore Leonard's contemporary crime novels but it is one of the first to get it right – anything that contains the line "There's something about your face that makes me want to slap the shit out of it" must be said to have got the spirit of the material right.

The line is spoken by Harry Mitchell (Roy Scheider), coming down hard on the blackmailer (John Glover) who is threatening to ruin his up-from-his-bootstraps business and his marriage to would-be Los Angeles city councillor Barbara (Ann-Margret). There is an ongoing debate between a friend and myself about whether the accent employed by Glover is meant to be a Baltimore or Philadelphia brogue, but I suppose the important thing to note is that his character Alan Raimy is one of the most unctuous and oleaginous I've ever seen – though his accomplices, played by Clarence Williams III and Robert Trebor, both offer stiff competition.

52 Pick-Up was made not long after its director John Frankenheimer had picked himself up off the floor following over a decade of increasingly debilitating alcoholism, to which one might attribute his intimate acquaintance with the depths of human debasement. (See, for instance, his dispatch from the dregs, his 1973 film of Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*.) As a result, *52 Pick-Up* feels like the wholly mature project of a middle age that's beyond all pipe-dream illusions, aided inestimably by Scheider and Ann-Margret's portrayal of midlife domestic compromise – strange to say of a movie that is basically a thriller, but some of its standout sequences are the chamber-drama moments involving nothing flashier than the revelation of infidelity and the rebuilding of trust.

Moving from the world of swimming-pool privilege to the sweaty, flesh-peddling lower depths, showing the prevalence of



Altered states: Fellini – *Satyricon*

entrepreneurial spirit and use of women as trophy objects in both, *52 Pick-Up* is a perspicacious piece of social satire, and one of the finer movies by this excellent filmmaker.

Disc: Typically of Kino's Studio Classics line, there's nothing in the way of special features, while the transfer can't reasonably be described as better than adequate.

MIDNIGHT RUN

Martin Brest; USA 1988; Second Sight Films/Region B Blu-ray; 126 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: interviews, promo reel, trailer

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Among the finest 'buddy' action-comedies ever made, this funny, fast-paced and tense adventure tracks the attempts of irritable bounty hunter Jack Walsh (Robert De Niro, in his best comic turn) to transport dodgy accountant Jonathan Mardukas (Charles Grodin, playing finicky and fussy to sly perfection) through a host of American states and into the hands of a bail bondsman. The FBI, which also wants to get its hands on the slippery, resourceful Mardukas, does everything in its power to intervene.

While the terrific central pairing is the main draw – De Niro and Grodin share a rare chemistry – *Midnight Run* is a banquet for fans of underrated character actors. Pungently essaying a variety of nefarious types, craggy-faced vets such as Joe Pantoliano, Philip Baker Hall, John Ashton and Yaphet Kotto all do wonders with limited screen time. Best of all, however, is the late Dennis Farina, who gets the saltiest dialogue as perpetually enraged mobster Jimmy Serrano (sample line: "You and that other dummy better start getting more personally involved in your work or I'm gonna stab you through the heart with a fuckin' pencil").

Midnight Run was a career high for director Martin Brest, sandwiched between his box-office hits *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984) and *Scent of a Woman* (1992). Brest last blessed the world with *Gigli* in 2003, and hasn't been heard from since.

Disc: Crisp, clean transfer.

NETWORK

Sidney Lumet; USA 1976; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray; 121 minutes; Certificate 15; 1.85:1; Features: 'The Directors: Sidney Lumet', video essay by Dave Izkoff, theatrical trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

There are, to generalise grossly, two schools of thought on *Network*: for the fans it is

a prophetic, grand-guignol satire, with a brilliantly eloquent script by Paddy Chayefsky and a career-crowning performance by Peter Finch (clearly what the Academy thought in 1976, when *Network* won three out of the four acting Oscars plus best original screenplay); for the haterz, it is a slab of snobbish, talky, overacted melodrama with pretensions.

Neither view is entirely wrong. The film now feels weirdly distant in time – the giant phones, the sexual politics. But its anxieties about television as a medium that amplifies and distorts our most irrational, venal impulses (I bet Chayefsky had been reading Marshall McLuhan) hardly look misplaced; and if the script does more telling than showing, well, it is preaching the verbal and the rational. Some of the acting looks less impressive – Finch's Howard Beale, news anchor turned mad prophet, is often overblown, though always compelling, and he has a few moments of quiet, beautifully drawn despair; Faye Dunaway as the bitch-goddess TV exec who won't stop talking schedules even during sex, apart from a short sharp orgasm, is if anything too brittle – hard to see what attracts William Holden's decent old-school newsman.

Among a very fine supporting cast, Ned Beatty, often underrated, stands out as the CEO who matches Beale's insanity with his own prophetic mode of capitalism.

Disc: The Blu-ray lives up to Beale's "cleansing moment of clarity" – in particular, bringing out the beige and chocolate tones of the 70s design (easy to see where Ron Burgundy came from). The Lumet TV feature is starry but over-reverential; Dave Izkoff's 'essay' is packed with illuminating information about Chayefsky's methods and intentions, but has lousy sound quality.

PAPER MOON

Peter Bogdanovich; USA 1973; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG; 102 minutes; 1.78:1; Features: director's audio commentary, featurettes ('The Next Picture Show', 'Asking for the Moon', 'Getting the Moon'), essay booklet

Reviewed by Kate Stables

"I saw it as an anti-Shirley Temple movie," Peter Bogdanovich said of this hit comedy, which he took on (like *The Last Picture Show*) at the suggestion of his ex-wife and production designer Polly Platt.

Adapted from Joe David Brown's rather more nostalgic novel *Addie Pray*, it's a bittersweet road movie in which a con artist and the wily orphan he probably fathered fleece suckers across the flat plains of Depression-era Kansas. Combining 30s elements – a Ford dust-bowl aesthetic, a Hawks-style clashing couple – with 70s cynicism allows it to resist sentimentality to a pleasing degree. Key to this is László Kovács's classic black-and-white cinematography, a wide ribbon of weary Walker Evans faces and windblown landscapes. The ubiquitous use of deep focus benefits the story, as well as the film's period look, as when Tatum O'Neal's quick-witted Addie conjures a doorstep scam from behind her father's back. But the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress she famously won for her stubborn, scowling performance has overshadowed how good Madeline Kahn's blowsy love rival is – there's a hint of

Television

OLIVE KITTERIDGE

Lisa Cholodenko; HBO/USA 2014; Warner Home Video/Region-free Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 231 minutes; 16:9

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Olive Kitteridge arrives wreathed in a kind of nostalgic glow. Apart from being set in the present day, more or less, it has all the qualities you associate with the better sort of costume drama (ie, not *Downton*).

Slow, thoughtful, beautifully shot, grave to the point of moroseness, unwilling to fob the viewer off with such lollipops as jokes or sex or hope, it feels like a relic of another time, when TV wasn't so commercial, so restless, so consumed by anxious visions of your finger on the remote control, as if such a time ever existed. It is adapted from a novel – more precisely, a set of linked stories – by Elizabeth Strout, which won a Pulitzer in 2009. Frances McDormand bought the rights, and co-produced (with Tom Hanks) as well as starring; Lisa Cholodenko (*Laurel Canyon*; *The Kids Are All Right*) directed. When it was first shown on TV late last year, broadcasters in the US and the UK showed its four episodes over two consecutive evenings, turning it into an Event.

Pacing, literary roots, scheduling, sprinkling of Tinseltown stardust – they all signal 'quality' so loudly that the important question gets drowned out: is it good, or merely prestigious? One point in its favour is Olive herself. Over the 25 years the series covers, from middle age to retirement and widowhood, she is unvaryingly miserable, bitter, suspicious, eager to condemn; it can't be a coincidence that her initials spell out exactly what she is not. She is a martinet to the pupils she teaches maths, a shrew to her husband, a crushing weight to their son, a horror to the neighbours and the in-laws (her awkwardness at her son's wedding, in the second episode, provides something close to comic relief). Such a stytic presence at the heart of a fiction is quite a novelty. It must be tempting for an actor to soften the edges, through pathos or caricature, and McDormand mostly resists both (except that pathos creeps in towards the end). Richard Jenkins is, unsurprisingly, an excellent match as her cloyingly decent, kindly husband Henry.

The most startling, enjoyable moment in the series comes in the third episode, when the now ageing couple are caught up in a late-night hold-up at the local hospital; they bicker, he asks why she never left him, she snaps that she nearly did – and Henry bursts out laughing; in a moment, he shows how much he knows and understands, what a mask his 'niceness' is.

But there is a lot wrong, too: a weakness for star names means that the singer in the bar in a smallish town on the coast of Maine is Martha Wainwright, and the final episode is unbalanced, almost to the point of capsizing, by Bill Murray. While Jane Anderson's screenplay is tactful, refraining from underlining things too hard, it's clear that it is drawn to a somewhat melodramatic, mechanical notion of character – Olive's father's suicide is alluded to several times, as though this should be the key that unlocks her personality – and the odd moments of magic realism (a long sliver of apple peel transforms into a snake) don't fit. I had the sense



Olive Kitteridge She is unvaryingly bitter, suspicious, eager to condemn; it can't be a coincidence that her initials spell out exactly what she's not

that Olive remained, at some level, insufficiently imagined – this wasn't a portrait but a sketch adorned with doodles and flourishes.

Disc: Good, clean picture. No extras.

THE TOP SECRET LIFE OF EDGAR BRIGGS

LWT; UK 1974; Network/Region 2 DVD;

Certificate 12; 330 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Shortly before David Jason got his big break, as foil to Ronnie Barker in *Open All Hours*, the producer Humphrey Barclay, whose eye for talent wasn't always matched by quality control, set up this Cold War spy spoof as a vehicle for him. It only lasted one 13-episode series, and the rumour going about the web is that Sir David himself has refused permission for any repeat or release before now. You can see why he might. The show has one overriding gag: that Jason's character, assistant to the head of the Secret Intelligence Service, is an obvious and notorious schlemiel who somehow "gets results". Everything else – plot, plausibility, character – is subordinated to the schlemiel end of the gag: every time Briggs walks through a door, you know there's a good chance it will turn out to be a wardrobe or a broom cupboard; the presence of pretty much any kind of food,

but especially dessert, means that he is going to end up smearing it on someone's face; if anyone hints at the secret nature of some business, you can guarantee that he'll end up shouting it across the street or broadcasting it over a PA system. Frank Spencer levels of clumsiness go along with Captain Mainwaring levels of pomposity.

Jason is a trouper: he double-takes, falls over, leers at the female cast, performs silly walks, pulls funny faces, sticks his tongue out of the corner of his mouth and wrestles through a lot of inadequately choreographed slapstick. It is a rather magnificent performance, but in vain: he has no decent characters to play against, and the few lines worth delivering emerge from plots so flimsily rigged together that you wonder why they bothered – the "gets results" end of the gag seems mostly to be tacked on at the last minute. In effect, a gifted comic actor is reduced to clowning.

Edgar Briggs may have been designed as a vehicle for him, but Jason seems to be dragging the whole thing along single-handedly. Anybody who wants to understand how you become a national treasure should start here, rather than with *Open All Hours* or *Only Fools and Horses*: you get a better idea of how far a willingness to wade through shit is part of the deal.

Disc: Decent transfer. No extras.

New releases

 bruised pathos in her jiggling pantomime of femininity. Ryan O'Neal displays his facility for playing weak-willed chancers, which would be mined again in *Barry Lyndon* (1975).

The critical response was surprisingly mixed (Vincent Canby perceptively noted that the film "never makes up its mind whether it wants to be an instant antique or a comment on one"). But its skilful and drily touching charm carried the day – and still does today.

Disc: A fine-textured 1080bp transfer shows the film off to advantage, and retains the handsome high contrast, the product of Orson Welles's advice to "use red filters". The featurettes create an exhaustive history, enlivened by outtakes illustrating the vast number of takes required to create that breezy father-daughter patter.

PICTURES OF THE OLD WORLD

Dušan Hanák; Czechoslovakia 1972; Second Run/Region O DVD; 65 minutes; Features: Hanák short films 'Old Shatterhand Came to Us' (1966) and 'Mass' (1967)

Reviewed by Nick Bradshaw

Following releases of Stefan Uher's *The Sun in a Net* (1962) and Juraj Jakubisko's *Birds, Orphans and Fools* (1969), Dušan Hanák's *Pictures of the Old World* marks the latest instalment of Second Run's excavation of Slovakian film-history gems.

A portrait, in crystalline monochrome, of sundry end-of-the-earth denizens of Slovakia's northern Tatra mountains and farmlands, it would have an ice-preserved time-capsule quality if it weren't so teeming with vitality and vivacity. It was inspired by Martin Martinec's similarly spirited photographic series of these characters – oddballs, outcasts, physical cripples, survivors and dreamers abiding in severe material poverty – but rather than document the symbols, Hanák extends and enhances them with a fearsomely adventurous and accomplished montage of *vérité*, interviews, voiceovers, surrealist found objects, treated sounds and Haydn; the result echoes the ethnography of Pasolini and Ben Rivers, the pop art of William Klein and the wildness of Jan Svankmajer, who must have contributed to the *marionnettes trouvées* sequence.

Disc: Two accompanying shorts, *Old Shatterhand Came to Us* (1966) and *Mass* (1967), further evince Hanák's tonal dexterity, dodging between barbed satire, absurdism and reverence. The transferred restoration is lovely, and Jonathan Owen's extended booklet notes are knowledgeable and rewarding.

THE STRANGE AFFAIR OF UNCLE HARRY

Robert Siodmak; USA 1945 Olive Films/Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 DVD; 80 minutes; 1.37:1

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The mid-40s were something of a golden age for insincere happy endings in Hollywood, what with Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) and Lang's *The Woman in the Window* (1944), but perhaps the most brazenly insincere belongs to Robert Siodmak's *The Strange Affair of Uncle Harry*.

Siodmak, a perennially underrated German émigré currently being honoured with a season at the BFI Southbank, produced a string of stylish, caustic films in the *noir*/thriller mode before returning to his homeland in the 1950s,



Gossip boys: *Sweet Smell of Success*

and *Uncle Harry*, a masterwork of small-town asphyxiation, is among the finest of them. George Sanders plays Harry, last scion of a once proud New Hampshire family, now reduced to painting patterns at the local textile mill to support his sisters Hester (Moyna Macgill) and Lettie (Geraldine Fitzgerald). Lettie, a codependent hypochondriac, is thrown into a quiet panic by the arrival of Deborah (Siodmak regular Ella Raines), a New York businesswoman who visits the factory and becomes engaged to the shy, duty-bound Harry. And so the punishment begins.

Raines's Deborah – self-assured, glittering with bemused contempt at Lettie's head games – is maybe the only character who comes off well here. Lettie is a manipulative, dishonest creature driven by consuming jealousy, a possible relation of Gene Tierney's Ellen in the same year's *Leave Her to Heaven*. (It is a mark of Fitzgerald's accomplishment that she is not altogether hateful, for her pure-if-smothering affection for Harry shines through). While our sympathies are with Harry at first and the suave Sanders has never been so fine as he is here, playing a stammering nebbish, in time his vacillation and lack of initiative grow galling. Finally, one feels that the only humane solution is to set a torch to this warped family tree, as Marco Bellocchio would do in his *Fists in the Pocket* 20 years later. In fact, Siodmak did exactly that, until the dictates of the MPAA forced him into an insincere 'it was only a dream' recantation. It is such compromises, one imagines, that eventually put him on the boat back to Hamburg.

Disc: Olive's presentation is free of supplemental materials if not free of blemishes, its visuals somewhat patchy due to the mixed quality of available elements.

SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS

Alexander Mackendrick; USA 1957; Arrow Academy/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 96 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: appreciation and scene commentaries by Philip Kemp, 'Mackendrick: The Man Who Walked Away' TV documentary, theatrical trailer, essay booklet

Reviewed by Kate Stables

"A heartless, lurid piece of filmmaking, a study in ultra-modern evil", blared the *Daily Herald* of Alexander Mackendrick's stingingly cynical late *noir*, scrutinising the dirty favour-trade between gossip columnist and showbiz supplicants. *Sweet Smell of Success* was shot in crowded New York night-time locations, and with its rainy neon feel (like *The Naked City*) inflected by Weegee's

pulp pics, and driven by Elmer Bernstein's blaring brass score, it's a febrile, nervous picture. A male melodrama, in which Tony Curtis's scheming flack and Burt Lancaster's monstrous columnist use and abuse one another ruthlessly, in a gloriously twisted version of their *Trapeze* chemistry, it's also a dazzlingly vicious piece.

James Wong Howe's glistening cinematography ups the film's slippery feel (wet pavements, brilliantined locks, the shiny, warped reflections of Lancaster's glasses), as Michael Brooke's sharp-eyed booklet essay, included with Arrow's disc, suggests. Meanwhile Philip Kemp's authoritative commentaries, unpacking the film's harsh portrait of post-war New York, its dense, sinewy exchanges and its tortured production history, dissect the film skilfully. Kemp's play-by-play breakdown of Clifford Odets's ricocheting 'gutter baroque' dialogue suggests that fast talk (in every sense) is the film's ammunition, not just the "greedy murmur of little men".

Mackendrick, whose elaborate, much studied camera moves ensured that his cut prevailed, finds rich seams of black humour throughout – a neat reversal of the Ealing maxim that he valued "the snarl beneath the grin".

Disc: A lustrous transfer, and a beautifully produced package of extras. Most fascinating is Mackendrick's student handout from his time at CalArts, included in the essay booklet, recounting how Odets gave him a masterclass in riffing, pummelling and paring back each scene until it gave all it could.

VICE AND VIRTUE

Roger Vadim; France 1963; Kino/Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 DVD Dual Format; 106 minutes; 2.35:1

Reviewed by Dan Callahan

A Roger Vadim film starring a 20-year-old Catherine Deneuve which takes the Marquis de Sade's *Justine* as its source material sounds like hot stuff, but *Vice and Virtue* transposes the material to France under Nazi Occupation, and so Vadim strains for significance rather more than titillation here.

Innocent virgin bride Justine (Deneuve) turns to her corrupt sister Juliette (Annie Girardot) for help after her husband is captured by the Nazis, who then capture the nubile Justine for themselves. She is sent to a chateau, where she is groomed to be a concubine. The things that go on at this chateau are far more decorous and polite than all the nasty sexual slavery in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò* (1975) but there does come a time when Deneuve's Justine is stripped to the waist and given over to a leering Nazi officer, at which point Vadim cuts to a close-up of her lovely tear-stained face on the bed afterwards.

Vice and Virtue has that distinctively clammy, vaguely unpleasant feeling that can be discerned in all Vadim's films, but it remains a curiosity because it seems to anticipate not only *Salò* but also the erotic journey of Deneuve's *Belle de jour* (1967). It should be of special interest to fans of Deneuve, who had a child by Vadim but did not marry him or work with him again.

Disc: No special features here but a fine widescreen print. 

Lost and found

LA VERITE SUR BEBE DONGE

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

The *Gone Girl* of its day, this French *noir* shows a marriage poisoned both figuratively and literally by a husband's cruelty

Reviewed by Farram Smith Nehme

Last year's darkly amusing *Gone Girl* was often described as an indictment of marriage, which is true, to the extent that it warned us all not to marry sociopaths. But David Fincher's expert thriller also reminded me of a much harsher film – one that shows a union of essentially normal people, where murder is the fated outcome of years spent with infidelities, sulks, absences and insults all lodging under the skin like splinters.

That movie is *La Vérité sur Bébé Donge* (*The Truth of Our Marriage*), French director Henri Decoin's *noir* from 1952, in which we know from the beginning that François Donge has been poisoned by his wife. And in between scenes of Donge helpless in a hospital bed, we get a series of flashbacks to explain why.

Wife Bébé, played by Danielle Darrieux in full flower, begins as a dreamy and naive young woman, who says she wants "to live openly, like a book, like a window, with nothing between us". Jean Gabin is François, a rich man almost entirely preoccupied with getting richer, when not using and discarding a string of mistresses. Despite all that, he marries the dowry-less Bébé, whose youth and idealism at first intrigue him.

Worse mismatches than this have endured. Yet, as critic Imogen Sara Smith puts it, "at a certain point the viewer not only understands why his wife put poison in his coffee, but feels she was quite right to do so." It becomes evident why Bébé doesn't love their son (who is never shown), why François's own brother is covering up the attempted murder, and why the attending doctor looks at his patient with ill-concealed loathing. "It was him or me," Bébé calmly tells the magistrate who's trying to penetrate the family *omertà* surrounding her crime. He kisses her on the cheek, and this too is a gesture whose meaning is clear.

And like the source of the spiked coffee, the reason this richly layered movie is rarely shown and even more rarely discussed is also a non-mystery. It flopped at the box office – the fashion for *noir* was abating in France, and audiences didn't care for this unsympathetic version of Gabin. Still, it got good reviews, and its excellence might ordinarily have kept it from dropping out of sight. But Decoin belonged to the 'Tradition of Quality', the French filmmakers whose reputations crumbled under sustained attack from what the *New Yorker's* Richard Brody loves to call "the young critics of *Cahiers*". As Dave Kehr wrote in 2009, "François Truffaut's 1954 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema' really was the atomic bomb of movie reviewing, obliterating an entire artistic landscape in one blast." Having



Till death do us part: Jean Gabin and Danielle Darrieux in *La Vérité sur Bébé Donge*

Murder is the fated outcome of years spent with infidelities, sulks, absences and insults

successfully argued that the prospective home-grown competition was old and out of it, the New Wave and their few pre-approved French antecedents have ever since dominated revival houses, home video and film discussions. For those of us trying to seek it out, pre-1960 French cinema is not so much a wave but a trickle. Decoin was not named in Truffaut's essay but he and screenwriter Maurice Aubergé certainly committed Truffaut's sin of "unfaithfulness to the spirit" of what they adapted. They took Georges Simenon's novel and jettisoned nearly everything but the basic idea of a man who knows that he's been poisoned by his wife.

As well as vivid dialogue and complex characters, the film has great visual allure: the

cinematographer was Léonce-Henri Burel, who was DP on Abel Gance's towering *Napoleon* and who went on to work with Robert Bresson.

Bébé is forced to visit her husband daily for appearances' sake. Decoin shoots Darrieux in the sickroom door looking like the angel of death, face alight, body in shadow, wearing a perfect black suit – graceful, chic, implacable. The couple's first official meeting, at a matchmaker's afternoon tea, plays out in a gilt-edged mirror, as though they're exchanging portraits like the nobility of old. Their first kiss gives way to a wedding shot from the back of the church. The camera glides up the aisle, declining to show faces, thus suggesting that good match or bad, it's all one to the Church. When François speaks to his mistresses, and indeed the first time we see him address Bébé, his dialogue is inaudible. For such moments, words don't matter. It's all in Gabin's predatory look.

Still, François isn't entirely a monster, but rather a certain type of husband: inexpressive, uninterested in conversation, with a roving eye he feels no obligation to rein in. Bébé, like many another woman, at first believes it's only a matter of time before she unlocks her man's emotional side. And it is, in fact, a side that exists – once he's been poisoned. We hear it in François's self-reproachful interior monologues, and see it in his face when he pleads for another chance with his wife. Bébé looks back at him, and changes the subject to their annual party. "I feel nothing any more," she tells her husband. In the devastating final shot, a car pulls away into the night, growing smaller until distance snuffs out the headlights.

Perhaps the long view can make other things recede. After 60 years, Truffaut's arguments about "le cinéma de papa" are themselves looking outdated. Who nowadays is outraged by anti-clericalism, by negativity or blasphemy? *La Vérité sur Bébé Donge* is far from the only one of "papa's" films that deserves to be retrieved from the attic. 

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



'If, technically, Decoin's essay in incompatibility falters, it contains several illuminating sequences. The march of time is ingeniously conveyed... Danielle Darrieux sensitively portrays

the hardening of the emotional arteries, without giving any indication of the hate seething beneath her composed exterior. Jean Gabin's... acting takes on alarming depth and resonance'

T.J.B. 'Monthly Film Bulletin', May 1955

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Books



Chemical reaction: Michael Curtis's mystery-horror *Doctor X* (1932) was one of the last films to be made using the two-colour Technicolor process

FLYING COLOURS

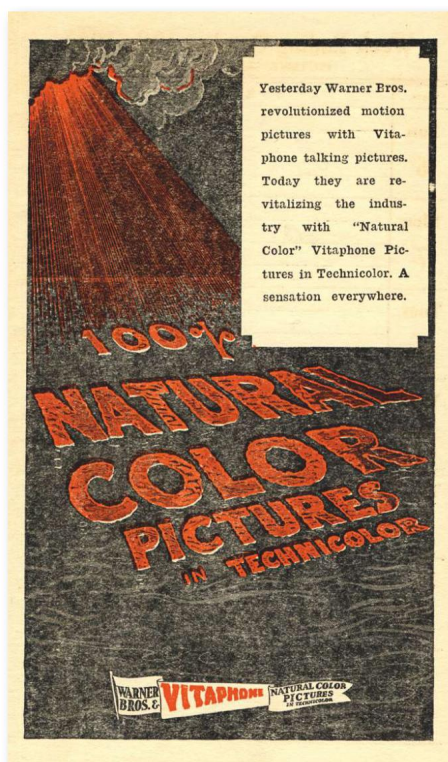
THE DAWN OF TECHNICOLOR 1915-1935

By James Layton and David Pierce, George Eastman House, 448 pp, £40, hardback, ISBN 9780935398281

By Sonia Genaitay

The general perception of Technicolor automatically appends the word 'glorious', and conjures up a swathe of visually vibrant films that stepped out of a black-and-white past in the late 1930s. In fact, when Dorothy was blown out of a monochrome Kansas into the kaleidoscopic Oz in 1939 she was stepping into the fourth process commercialised by the eponymous company. Technicolor first staked a claim in the industry by producing *The Gulf Between* in 1917, and evolved through a series of colour processes, all of which were branded as Technicolor, but all of which were very different.

The Dawn of Technicolor expertly unravels the threads that made its success possible, charting the company's history up to the release of the three-colour, dye-transfer (ie 'glorious') *Becky Sharp* in 1935. There have been previous publications on the subject, including Richard W. Haines's valiant attempt to describe each process and catalogue all the productions in *Technicolor*



A Warner Bros advert for its 1929-30 season

Movies: The History of Dye Transfer Printing, but this is an achievement on another scale.

The book is published by the George Eastman House (an archive and museum of motion pictures and photography based in the former residence of the founder of Kodak) to coincide with the 2015 centenary of the creation of Technicolor. The authors, David Pierce, the former curator of the BFI National Archive, and the archivist James Layton, have benefited not just from the significant investment that has been put into the production of this glossy behemoth of a book, but also from having full access to the Technicolor corporate archive, acquired by the George Eastman House in 2009. Diaries, correspondence, annual reports, accounts – basically the life and breath of the company are gathered in this extraordinary archive material.

It is somehow ironic that the George Eastman House should publish such a lavish account of the formative years of a company that was for many years Kodak's rival. One of the strengths of the book lies in systematically putting Technicolor's endeavours into a wider perspective, and exposing the multifaceted struggles it faced throughout its history. There were competitors (Kinemacolor to start with, but also Multicolor, Prizma and cheaper applied colours, as in tinting and toning or Handschiegl), and it suffered from being tied to a risk-averse industry, the habits of which were

difficult to change. Producers were slow to pick up on new trends, and distributors had cold feet. However the biggest hurdles were technical. Obtaining correct registration, colour rendition or print quality consistency to name but a few, required a large amount of testing to get right.

So-called 'natural colour' was the holy grail of many cinematographers from the dawn of cinema, but it took time for technology to catch up with ambitions. Inspired by the strengths and weaknesses of the British Kinemacolor process, three engineers with no background in cinema developed their own process based on the additive colour system. In essence, this involved a camera fitted with coloured filters to simultaneously record a red and green image on to a black-and-white negative. The colour is generated on screen by projecting the resulting positive through the same set of filters. Unfortunately, additive colour applied to moving image had insurmountable flaws, which could only be remedied by investing in further research, something Technicolor was able to do better than its competitors, thanks to

Producers were slow to pick up on new trends and distributors had cold feet, but Technicolor's biggest hurdles were technical

the business acumen of the company's co-founder and president Herbert T. Kalmus. His vision and goal of a three-colour system was set very early, but the dream only became palpable when the dye-printing imbibition process produced promising results. Dye transfer combined with subtractive colour recording would be the real breakthrough.

The period from 1915-35 was one in which cinema cemented its place as both a business and an artform, and saw myriad technological changes – not least the arrival of sound. Developments such as colour processes had to justify their higher costs to prove themselves more than a gimmick; they needed to satisfy both the artistic needs of filmmakers and audiences, but also the often eccentric business acumen of studio executives. Running a company in an industry that was equal parts showbiz and cutthroat economics must have been frequently infuriating for engineers who knew nothing of the industry, which makes the book's narrative all the more compelling.

The book itself is a magnificent object and a great deal of work has clearly gone into its design. The frame grabs have been scanned at high resolution and magnified so we can better appreciate the unique qualities of the photography. Almost a third of the book has been given over to a very well-researched appendix cataloguing every two-colour Technicolor film ever produced, as well as unfinished projects (down to the lengths of surviving elements in archives around the world) – a resource that will no doubt be useful to historians and archivists. The George Eastman House, Pierce and Layton have set the bar very high for future publications. Let's hope others pick up the baton. **S**

THE CINEMA OF POETRY

By P. Adams Sitney. Oxford University Press, 296pp, £19.99, ISBN 9780199337033

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The Cinema of Poetry, the latest work from the pre-eminent scholar of American avant-garde cinema, P. Adams Sitney, is, as the author states in his introduction, a book a lifetime in the making, born of twinned early enthusiasms for poetry and cinema, and a desire to tease out points of intersection between the two.

In returning to the question, Sitney refers to texts he has been rereading and teaching for five decades. One is the roundtable on 'Cinema and Poetry' hosted in 1953 by Amos Vogel's Cinema 16, whose panellists included Maya Deren, Dylan Thomas, Arthur Miller and the poet and critic Parker Tyler. (As Sitney points out, avant-garde films were once popularly referred to as 'cine-poems', and still today there is a significant overlap between the disciplines of poetry and non-narrative film.) Another is Pier Paolo Pasolini's essay 'The 'Cinema of Poetry'', first delivered at the Mostra Internazionale di Nuovo Cinema in Pesaro, Italy, in 1965, which theorises that a poetic cinema was achievable through the employment of a "filmic version of free indirect point of view", a subjectivity that Pasolini identified in Antonioni's *Red Desert*, among other films.

The structure of Sitney's book is essentially dictated by the transatlantic schism, divided as it is between the European art cinema that Pasolini was addressing, and the New American Cinema represented by Vogel, Cinema 16 and their ilk. The first half of *The Cinema of Poetry*, 'Poetry and the narrative cinema in Europe', applies Pasolini's idea of "free indirect point of view" to a close reading of Dimitri Kirsanoff's 1926 silent *Ménilmontant*, as well as to the works of Ingmar Bergman and Andrei Tarkovsky, whose father, Arseny, was himself a poet. The second half, 'Poetry and the American avant-garde cinema', turns its attention to the work and theoretical writing of the North American filmmakers, who when known at all by the Europeans seem to have been dismissed by them. (Sitney cites Pasolini's printed "repudiation of the poetic claims of the American avant-garde cinema", particularly those of 'Burkage' – presumably Stan Brakhage – as well as the open derision Tarkovsky showed for Brakhage's



Dimitri Kirsanoff's *Ménilmontant*

work at the 1983 Telluride Film Festival.)

As that bit of scuttlebutt suggests, Sitney has the advantage of having had personal acquaintances with the filmmakers discussed in the book's second half, and that gives these chapters their privileged insider perspective. In his chapter on Joseph Cornell, Sitney recalls paying a visit to the artist in 1968 and finding him "translating" a poem by Jules Laforgue into a collage, allowing "an unanticipated glimpse at the transformation of poetry into imagery at play in Cornell's work [and] the intensity of his interiorization of poems". (An academic currently ensconced at Princeton University's Lewis Center for the Arts, Sitney's biographical-rich readings make it unsurprising that he bemoans the long reign of French semioticians, Lacan and his epigones, and "political factionalism".)

Following his discussion of Cornell, whom Sitney identifies as a uniquely influential figure, the author discusses two artists for whom encounters with Cornell proved essential: Lawrence Jordan and Brakhage. The latter is given the book's longest chapter, which begins with the young poet's encounters in the 1940s with the work of trailblazing modernists Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein, as well as contemporary poet Charles Olson, who synthesised their oppositional forces. At times Sitney's rigorous exegeses of the work discussed only touches in passing on comparisons to poetry – the "Keatsian lushness" of Nathaniel Dorsky's work, or the relationship of Gregory Markopoulos's practice to "Classical Greek prosody" – but it would be absurd to reject such invaluable essays for not sufficiently adhering to a thematic throughline. (Here, a comment Sitney makes on Brakhage is apt: "He was never able to sustain a preconceived superstructure without making significant alterations as the series progressed.")

Elsewhere, Sitney locates filmmakers literally on the trail of poetic antecedents, as in Cornell's *A Legend for Fountains*, shot in the same New York streets that a lovelorn Federico García Lorca wandered when composing the film's inspiration, his 'Tu Infancia en Mentón', or Jordan's *H.D. Trilogy* – a response to the poet Hilda 'H.D.' Doolittle's three-part *Hermetic Definition* – in which camera movements "suggest both the subjective perspective of the solitary woman tourist and the view of the filmmaker, strolling with his companion [Joanna McClure], both of them appreciating together H.D.'s response to similar places three decades earlier".

Finally, Sitney concludes with reportage from a "cinematic pilgrimage site": Temenos, in the Arcadian mountains in the Peloponnese peninsula, where Markopoulos and his partner, Robert Beavers, have arranged for the exhibition of his life's work, the epic *Eniaios*, in four-year instalments. Shown in an environment where "the urbane poets of the Greek and Roman world imagined shepherds inventing and refining poetic language", Markopoulos imagined the Temenos events as "a cure of media pollution". Amid an excrescence of uninformed opinion, Sitney's scholarly, vigorous criticism may be said to serve the same function. **S**

LAST WORDS

Considering contemporary cinema

By Jason Wood; Wallflower Press; 192pp; hardback, £62, ISBN 9780231171960; paperback, £20.50, ISBN 9780231171977

Reviewed by Jane Giles

Described by its author as a follow-up to his 2007 publication *Talking Movies* and therefore “possibly the least anticipated film publication ever”, Jason Wood’s collection of interviews with 28 directors (and one actor/producer) in fact delivers a timely provocation on a number of levels.

The interviews were gathered by Wood over the last seven years, primarily in his role as a film programmer with Curzon Cinemas, and it’s worth noting that all of the films under discussion were on general release (rather than festival-only fare or one-off screenings). Many of the interviews were conducted by him as onstage post-screening discussions, and are published here as transcripts “to allow the filmmaker to communicate their ideas in an unfiltered form”, as Wood notes in his introduction.

Sight & Sound apart, there are few opportunities for filmmakers to speak to audiences at length about their work, and Wood delivers the apocalyptic prediction that “if the residual eradication of film culture continues in our press and on our screens, there is a genuine danger that you may not hear [these] voices or opinions in the future”. It’s a very simple equation: films that receive little or no media coverage are usually under-attended and cinemas cannot

afford this. Reviews by critics are not enough to guarantee an audience beyond film festivals, and the interview plays a crucial role in film culture, particularly in the realms of the “unique, challenging or non-conformist aesthetic vision”.

The interviews are arranged democratically in alphabetic order, from Lenny Abrahamson to Michael Winterbottom, with short introductions that mostly (but not always) indicate when the otherwise undated discussion took place. Of the people interviewed in *Last Words*, half are British (or Irish, or like Anton Corbijn, someone we claim as one of ours) and, without selling itself as a book about the state of national filmmaking, there’s no doubt that this collection provides a fascinating snapshot of key British talent now.

Between the first and last interviews, we encounter Clio Barnard, Joanna Hogg, Gideon Koppel, Andrew Köting (who also provides the Preface, setting the tone in his own idiosyncratic style), Joe Lawlor and Christine Molloy, James Marsh, Christopher Nolan, Ben Rivers, Peter Strickland, Tilda Swinton and Ben Wheatley. While expressing excellent taste in its choice of artistic voices, *Last Words* is, like the British film industry itself, short on black, Asian and minority ethnic diversity (Steve McQueen, Richard Ayoade and John Akomfrah would surely have been included in a pre-planned book of interviews; perhaps Amma Asante and Destiny Ekaragha are too mainstream for this collection), although with six women interviewed, the book is ahead of the UK’s pitiful ratio of female directors, despite the circumstantial absence of, for example, Carol Morley.

With his choice of international directors, Wood reveals a strong sense of film culture in

It’s a simple equation: films that receive little or no media coverage are usually under-attended and cinemas cannot afford this

the early 21st century, including Michel Gondry, Charlie Kaufman, Harmony Korine, Nicolas Winding Refn, Ira Sachs and Céline Sciamma. He includes two grand old men of film, Wim Wenders and Marco Bellocchio, whose work fits Wood’s aesthetic agenda, while their prolific careers remind us of how few films contemporary directors get to make. The difficulty of filmmaking is a recurring theme in many of the interviews.

Unusually for an interviewer, Wood’s ego is under control, with no words wasted on setting the scene or trying to convince the reader how well he got along with his subject. The interviewees are in turn articulate and expansive, making explicit their intentions, crediting key collaborators and citing influences. In terms of Wood’s own enduring concerns, he regularly picks up on the subject of film music and sound, whether it’s the use of Michael Nyman’s ‘Memorial’ and J. Ralph’s music in *Man on Wire*, Dennis McNulty’s ambient score for *Helen*, the silence in Joanna Hogg’s films, or the sonic experimentations of Koppel, Köting and Strickland. The other recurring theme is the exploration of family on film, particularly touching in Wood’s interviews with Hogg and Tilda Swinton. His enthusiasm is evident with the use of superlatives and some hyperbole, with only an occasional trace of disappointment reaching the surface of his writing. 

THE AUTHENTIC DEATH & CONTENTIOUS AFTERLIFE OF PAT GARRETT AND BILLY THE KID

By Paul Seydor, Northwestern University Press, 408pp, \$29.95, ISBN 9780810130562

Reviewed by Brad Stevens

With a handful of exceptions (notably a piece on Sergei Eisenstein that appeared in the winter 1973-74 issue of *Sight & Sound*), Paul Seydor’s published writings have dealt exclusively with one filmmaker: Sam Peckinpah. His previous books were studies of Peckinpah’s westerns, while his latest focuses on the director’s final contribution to the genre, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973).

Although Seydor’s new book does not stint on interpretation, his emphasis is on the film’s background and troubled production history; the opening chapters compare several drafts of the screenplay written by Rudy Wurlitzer, as well as those extensively revised by Peckinpah himself. Seydor refers only in passing to the actual shoot (which has been more than adequately covered elsewhere), jumping directly from his discussion of the screenplay to a comparison of various cuts of the film itself: two preview prints (one of which formed the basis of the 1988 reissue), a theatrical release disowned by the director, and a censored television version that added three scenes (including one missing from all the other

variants, though it can be found on YouTube). Seydor has long since passed the point where an academic interest becomes an obsession, and if his book is occasionally repetitive, that’s a small price to pay for the clarity with which he sets out the fruits of his research, even demonstrating how Peckinpah and Wurlitzer drew on conflicting historical accounts of Billy the Kid’s life.

Yet Seydor is far from an uncritical admirer of *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* – he finds it deeply flawed in many respects – and appears to have identified not so much with the film’s characters as with its creators, particularly during that

Paul Seydor has long since passed the point where an academic interest in Sam Peckinpah becomes an obsession

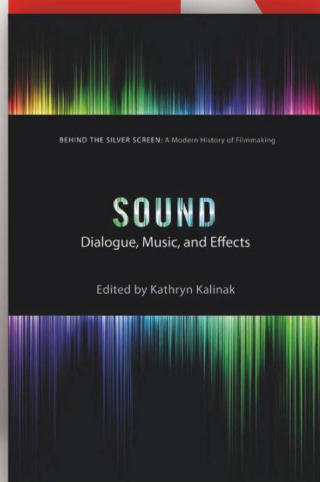


Lawman on your tail: Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid

period when they were struggling against absurd time constraints to assemble the filmed material into its final shape (a process which, he argues, was never completed). This identification allowed Seydor’s critical skills to merge with those he obtained working as a professional film editor (he is perhaps best known for his collaborations with director Ron Shelton), eventually enabling him to erase the line between observer and creator. In 2005, he assembled a Special Edition of *Pat Garrett* for DVD, combining the theatrical release (which he believes to be better edited overall) with those scenes unique to the preview versions. He restored an important sequence that was missing from the 1988 reissue, in which Aurora Clavel plays Garrett’s wife, and re-edited the opening montage, in which Garrett’s death (removed, against Peckinpah’s wishes, from theatrical prints) is intercut with shots of Billy shooting at chickens. Many Peckinpah specialists were critical of this edition, and the latter part of Seydor’s book is largely dedicated to justifying his editorial decisions. He makes a convincing case for the majority of these choices, though his failure to include a wonderful scene involving Elisha Cook Jr, Dub Taylor and Don Levy as a group of Shakespearean ‘rude mechanicals’ still seems to me an error (especially given that Peckinpah fought to retain it).

But no matter how much one might wish to argue with Seydor on points of detail, there’s little doubt that his position is coherently articulated, and although this book can hardly be recommended to anyone not already familiar with the film, Peckinpah enthusiasts will find it indispensable. 

Read



SOUND

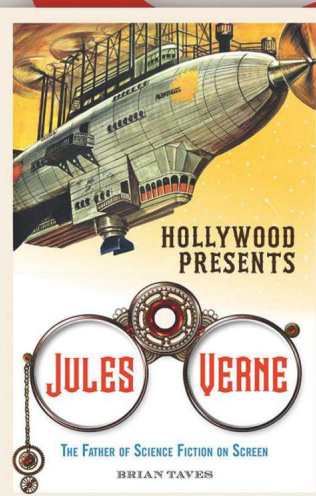
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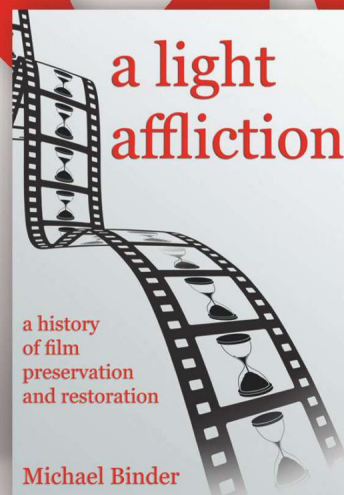
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A LIGHT AFFLICTION

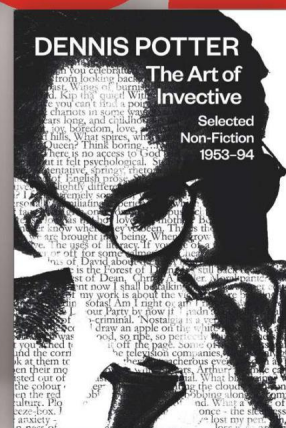
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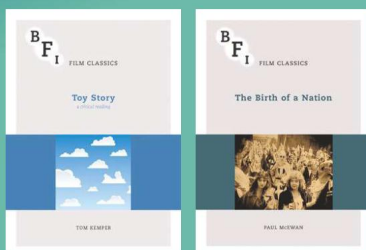
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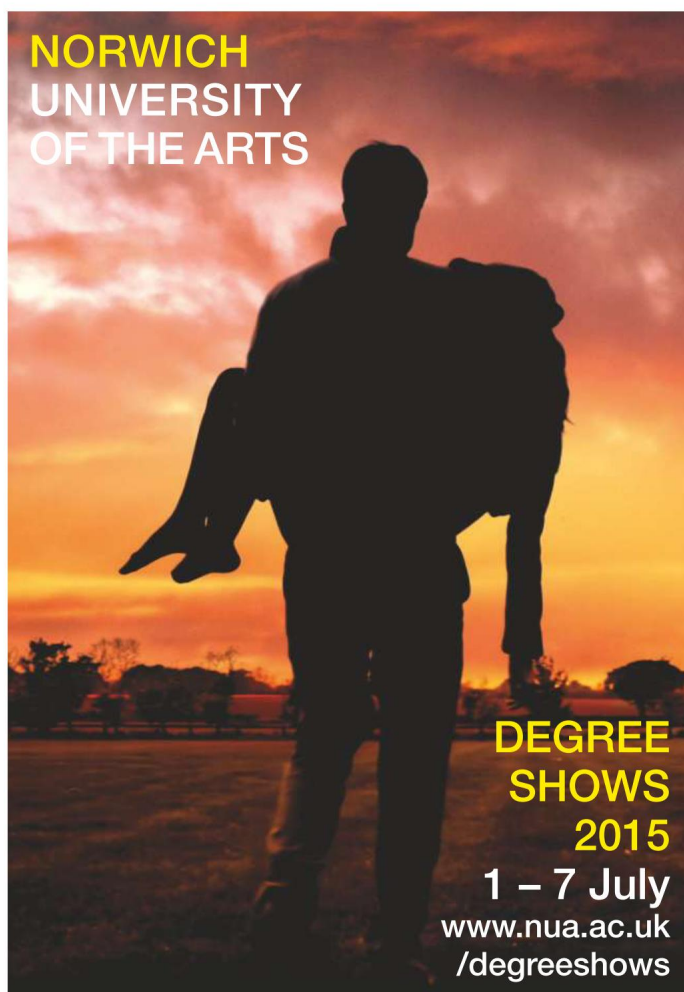
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READERS' LETTERS

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AGENDA BENDERS

Henry K. Miller, in his excellent review of three recent Hitchcock publications ('Man of mystery', *S&S*, May) bemoans the repetition of the same anecdotes, almost implying that the merit of detail is to be judged by whether it is a 'scoop' or not. He goes on to say that there is no longer a place for broader explorations of Hitchcock's life and canon.

Part of the difficulty with a broad-brush approach has undoubtedly been that it has so often been dominated by idiosyncratic agendas, such as the promotion of primarily cultural, literary or political models, which are thin on direct cinema scholarship – I am here thinking primarily of Žižek or Mulvey. This has had the effect of obscuring major themes within Hitchcock's work, such as the impact of class and gender discrimination.

But I would argue that broader studies still have a place, if only as an antidote to a very tired dominant Hitchcock paradigm, centred on pathologising psychological generalities, which is killing Hitchcock studies.

Stephane Duckett author of *'Hitchcock in Context'*, by email

NO LAUGHING MATTER

I'm afraid the critics have spent so much time lauding *While We're Young* (Films of the Month, *S&S*, April) for its observation and its preaching about the ethics of documentary film-making that they have forgotten that this movie has slipped up in the area where it should be keenest: comedy.

There were no guffaws, hardly any amused titters, and a paucity of interest in the cinema I frequent. In fact, the overwhelming sound from the audience resembled a rather bored snoring.

When are we going to get a film that unites us in appreciative gales of laughter and creates that family feeling that only a genuinely hilarious comedy can bring?

The Marx Brothers knew how to do it, so did Woody Allen, *Airplane!* and *Crocodile Dundee*. Instead we get Ben Stiller and his solipsistic brethren whingeing about their unhappy lot.

You react to this film as if it's clever. Well, I don't, because as erudite as the script is, it's not funny, and for a comedy not to be funny AIN'T CLEVER.

William Barklam London

GREAT OFFENCE

Finally, a much warranted, in-depth appraisal of Sidney Lumet's 1972 film *The Offence* (Home Cinema, *S&S*, May). I believe Sean Connery cites it as his favourite performance, and one can see why. Connery inhabits the role mercilessly, first seen glowering under a battered trilby, his broad frame swathed in the obligatory car coat, rage simmering just below the surface. From the outset, his character, DS Johnson, is a man permanently teetering on the edge, scarred by his past experiences as a police constable, and it only takes the catalyst of Baxter – his mirror image – to push him over.

LETTER OF THE MONTH OVERLOOKED GIANT



In his otherwise excellent survey of the 'Masterpieces of Polish Cinema' festival that is now touring the UK ('Pole to Pole', *S&S*, May), David Thompson's negative comments on the films of Krzysztof Zanussi – dated, detached and "prioritising dialogue over visuals", apparently – took me rather by surprise. Zanussi has always seemed to me one of the key directors of post-1970s Eastern European cinema, some of whose films, such as the superb *A Year of the Quiet Sun* and *The Contract*, deserve to be much better known. His 1980 masterpiece *The Constant Factor* (above) – about graft and corruption in contemporary Poland, to which

an idealistic hero finds he cannot turn a blind eye – is not only a brave and profoundly moving film for its time, but one rich in visual symbolism, from the overarching metaphors of mountains and mathematics down to tiny details, such as the moment when the hero is startled by a worm crawling near the candle on his mother's grave, undercutting his desire for purity and perfection. For me, Zanussi is up there with Wajda and Kieslowski as one of the giants of Polish film who embraced the cinema as the artform that most courageously interrogated the country's moral, social and political values.

Neil Sinyard Lincolnshire

He gets sterling support from Ian Bannen, Trevor Howard and Vivien Merchant.

Mark Fisher's review succinctly picks up on so many of the salient points inherent in the picture, not least the depiction of a grey and drizzle-bound England. Here is a microcosm of a society that has succumbed to a drab wasteland of featureless concrete walkways, tower blocks and council houses, the look realistically portraying a country many miles from 60s optimism; this is the 70s, and it shows. Lumet was the master of police procedural films, what with this, *Serpico* and *Prince of the City*. He was also a superlative director of actors (see *The Hill*, *12 Angry Men*, *The Fugitive Kind*, etc); here, he crafted a spot-on psychological analysis of a character torn from within. Kudos to *S&S* for publishing a piece on a unique picture which – whatever the deal – would never get made today with an actor of Connery's stature.

Pete Moore Brighton

VIRTUAL OBSCOLESCENCE

I've been amused, in this election season, to see how much attention the political classes pay to what is said about them by the newspapers – despite the fact that nobody I know under the

age of 30 bothers reading a newspaper regularly, if at all. I worry that *Sight & Sound* is in danger of becoming as detached from the public as our politicians are, and for similar reasons. I enjoy reading your DVD and Blu-ray reviews every month, but to more and more people films exist these days somewhere out in the ether, to be downloaded or streamed at will. Convenience is everything, and picture quality of secondary importance. The idea of paying good money to clutter up their living space with hard copies of films they have already watched leaves many people under 30 scratching their heads. This makes me a little sad, but there's no point denying reality. When and how is *S&S* going to start seriously addressing the availability of films and television on online platforms such as Netflix?

Marsha Rankin London

Additions and corrections

April p.71 *Blind*, 18, 95m 54s; p.73 *The Dark Horse*, 15, 124m 34s
May p.48 the still from *To Kill a Mockingbird* actually shows Scout's older brother Jem on the porch of the Radley house, not Scout as our caption stated; p.68 *Amar Akbar & Tony*, 15, 96m 11s; p.69 *Bypass*, 15, 104m 55s; p.74 *The Duff*, 12A, 101m 08s; p.79 *Gente de bien*, 12A, 86m 16s; p.82 *Harlock Space Pirate*, 12A, 111m 10s; p.85 *A Little Chaos*, 12A, 117m 35s; p.88 *The Salvation* the film was actually shot in South Africa, not the US as the review implied.

ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA



The opiate grin on Robert De Niro's face in the closing moments of Sergio Leone's gangster epic hints at absolution as much as addiction

By Craig Williams

What's in a smile? At the end of Sergio Leone's *Once upon a Time in America* (1983), Robert De Niro's Noodles is lying in an opium den in 1933, ready to forget his complicity in the events that have just led to the deaths of his former childhood compatriots. In the final shot, the camera looks down on him from above through a thin cloth that shrouds the bed on which he lies. His impassive expression suddenly breaks into a grin, which is held as the credits roll. The interpretation of the smile is largely dependent on whether we take as real the sequence that precedes it – one that happens some 30 years later, in which Noodles has returned from a long exile and come face to face with his old partner in crime, Max (James Woods).

Max and Noodles started their gang as children, robbing drunks and stealing cargo from the docks. Their lives were changed by Noodles's imprisonment for avenging the death of a friend. It was the moment that removed him from his pre-ordained track, leaving Max to step up and lead the gang to illicit prosperity during the Prohibition era. Things are not the same when Noodles returns; he urges caution in the cutthroat world of bootlegging, whereas Max is in thrall to that American compulsion towards empire-building. The schism between them eventually results in the deaths of their fellow gang members, and it is at this moment that Noodles enters the opium den.

One of the central questions of *Once upon a Time in America* is whether the subsequent sequence in the late 1960s actually happens, or whether Noodles's smile in the opium den is simply the result of a narrative of penance and forgiveness that he projects for himself at his lowest moment. Much of the film already feels like a dream, with its overture-like opening sequence and Freudian signifiers – recurring images of keys, bridges and suitcases – scattered throughout. The 60s sequence even bears the aspirational quality of a dream. In positioning Max as the man who stole his life, Noodles's transgressions are transferred to him, meaning Noodles himself is granted absolution without needing to answer for the worst of his crimes. Noodles's exile is pitched somewhere between self-pity and regret, a consolation he constructed to assuage the wages of sin.

Though the characters are Jewish, this preoccupation with absolution roots the film in the Catholic tradition – a recurring theme throughout Leone's work. The elaborate opium preparation during the finale is a sacrament; Noodles's criminal life ends with the smile and he is resurrected for long decades of penitence that lead ultimately to forgiveness. The question of whether this is imagined is crucial to the thematic thrust of the film. If the later events happen within the film's prescribed reality, then the ending – with Noodles refusing to kill Max and walking away, redeemed – forsakes poetry

Much of the film feels like a dream, with its Freudian signifiers – recurring images of keys, bridges and suitcases

for sentiment; but if it is indeed an illusion, then it shifts the subjectivity from the audience to Noodles, thus presenting a more complex vision of sin and regret; pitiable in its noble self-regard, but heartrending in its desperation.

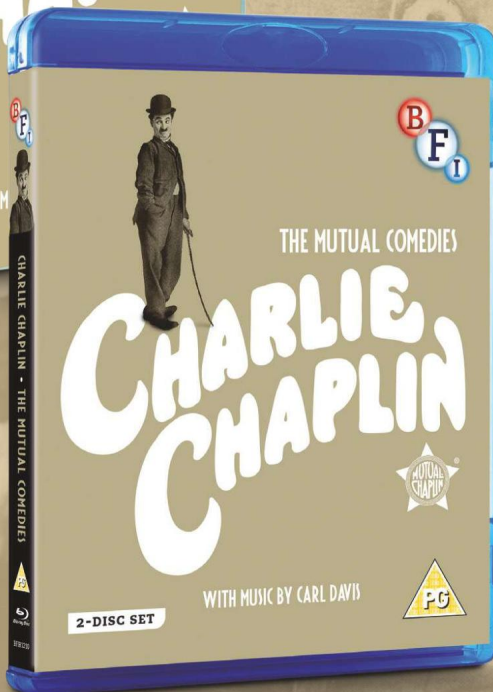
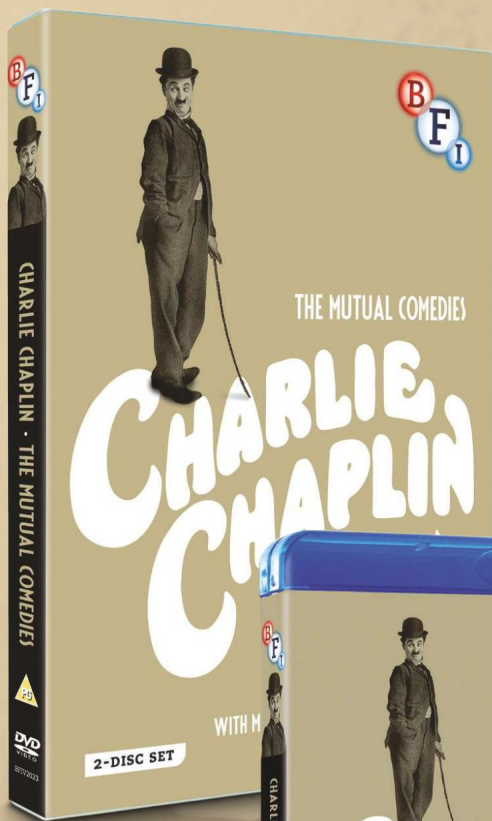
The focus on Noodles's smile is in keeping with Leone's approach to faces throughout the film. Mirrors appear constantly, serving as documents of encroaching mortality and, in several instances, as tools of Proustian recall, transporting Noodles into the past. By rooting the finale so firmly in the subjectivity of his protagonist's experience, Leone diminishes the role of the audience as the traditional moral arbiter in the gangster picture. The denouement is dictated by Noodles's conscience, not the viewer's desire for a moral reckoning to clear the ledger of his misdeeds, thus jettisoning the tragic arc so common in the genre.

That elusive smile can be seen as the midpoint between the karmic moral correctives provided by the deaths of Eddie Bartlett in *The Roaring Twenties* or Vito Corleone in *The Godfather*, and the defiantly unapologetic ending afforded to Jordan Belfort – the contemporary incarnation of the cinematic gangster – in *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013). It signifies a simple moment of satisfaction, either at the fleeting escape offered by the opium or by a delusion of redemption. The title itself provides a clue to the picture's oneiric bent, positioning the proceedings in the realm of legend, commensurate to the genre's capacity for self-mythology. This haunting twist on the happy ending is one of the most audacious in the canon. 

i The restored edition of *Once upon a Time in America*, with an extra 20 minutes of previously unseen footage, will screen at the Ritzy Cinema, London, on 24 May. See www.badlands-collective.com for details

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